

# WHAT HI★FI?

## SOUND AND VISION

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# AWARDS 2015

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## “Q ACOUSTICS DOES IT AGAIN”

What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, June 2015



### 3000 SERIES 5.1 CINEMA PACK

**Perfect for every occasion, the new 3000 Series 5.1 Cinema Pack will unleash the full potential of your home cinema electronics.**

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“Q Acoustics’ latest continues the company tradition of punching way above its weight. For the money, what you get here is extraordinary.”

**What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, June 2015**



“Frankly exceptional sonics that nothing I’ve listened to at the price can match.”

**AV Forums, Best Buy, July 2015**



“Q Acoustics’ superlative speaker package sets a new benchmark for standmount systems.”

**Trusted Reviews, Editors Choice, May 2015**

**Find out more at [www.Qacoustics.co.uk](http://www.Qacoustics.co.uk)**



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# Give me this Award, let's not make it the last...

Time flies. Where has the past year gone? Can it really have been 12 months? Etc and so on...

Yup, it's Awards time again - time for us to come down off the fence and give the definitive word on the very best hi-fi and home entertainment equipment you can buy. There are more categories than ever before, and more trophies up for grabs, but as usual the judging process has been a combination of the straightforward (our **favourite television (p62)**, for instance, was a debate that ended almost as soon as it started) and the vigorously contested (I'm thinking particularly of the **best DAC (p56)**, a discussion that threatened to become rather more physical than is generally acceptable in the workplace). Thankfully we're all friends again now, of course. Until this time next year, at least.



*Simon*

Simon Lucas, editor

## My product of the year



### Chord Mojo

Now more than ever, the DAC is the pivotal component of your system. The market is full of fine, high-performance DACs, but the Chord Mojo represents the finest value for money around.

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"If you're after big-screen thrills, you consider 4K a must-have and can stretch to £3000, we can't think of a better option than this"

## PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

### Awards 2015

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**Cambridge CXN**  
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"Sleek design, engaging sound and excellent features - a fantastic streamer for the money"  
Kashfia Kabir  
First tests editor



**Geneva AeroSphere Large** p101  
"Finally, a wireless speaker whose offbeat aesthetic is paired with sonic brilliance"  
Andrew Murphy  
Staff writer



**Tidal**  
p95  
"With CD-quality streams and an ever-expanding catalogue, it's one of the most compelling streaming services around"  
Becky Roberts  
Staff writer



**Tanoy Revolution XT 6F** p115  
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Ced Yuen  
News editor



**LG 55EG960V**  
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"Combining 4K and OLED to simply stunning results, this is the most desirable TV of the year"  
Verity Burns  
Multimedia editor



**VPI Prime**  
p110  
"You could easily spend twice as much and get an inferior sound"  
Ketan Bharadia  
International Technical editor



# 1500 TEST VERDICTS BUYING GUIDE



**Audiolab 8300A**

"Make no mistake, the 8300A is an amplifier that can impress easily"



**Denon AVR-X2200W**

"Denon has pulled out all the stops"



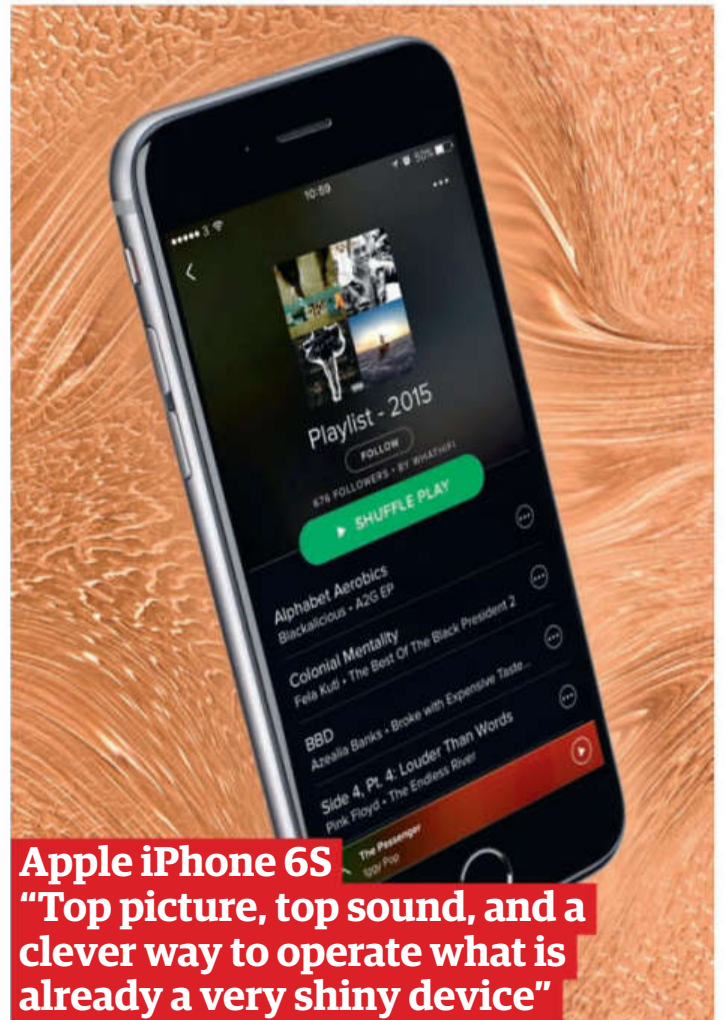
**Audio Addon Pro T3**

"It is both bigger and subtler than any portable wireless speaker we've heard around this price"



**Bluesound Generation 2**

"It's as expressive as it is subtle, able to pick out fine detail"



**Apple iPhone 6S**

"Top picture, top sound, and a clever way to operate what is already a very shiny device"

## Our ratings explained

### WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER

We test products as a team, in dedicated facilities, and compare them with their peers. That's why our ratings are the most authoritative in the industry.

One of the best	★★★★★
A serious contender	★★★★☆
Worth a look	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Awful	★☆☆☆☆

If it's one of our winners, you know it's top quality

# Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

# FIRST TESTS

**MORE  
FIRST TESTS**



**Naim ND5 XS**  
**£2250 Page 14**

A capable streamer, no matter what type of music you throw at it



**Galaxy S6 Edge+**  
**£540 Page 16**

Samsung boosts the Edge experience with a gorgeous smartphone



**Crosley Cruiser**  
**£80 Page 22**

This lovely-looking turntable doesn't quite come up to scratch

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**EXCLUSIVE**

## Make way for the next Generation...

**Bluesound Generation 2 | Multi-room system | £430+**

When a new company bursts into a competitive marketplace and immediately produces impressive results, we have to believe those in charge when they still say "we can do better". And that's exactly what high-res multi-room brand Bluesound has done, after a hugely successful first year in which it picked up our Product of the Year Award for 2014.

Over the past year, the company listened to feedback and has decided to redesign the

any changes to them. The new look for the Node 2, Pownode 2 and Vault 2 is a welcome one. While last year's look was striking, the shiny plastic finish did feel a little on the cheap side - not to mention that it was a nightmare for using with a traditional rack

This design feels much more grown up, better thought out and, thankfully, less of a haven for fingerprints too. The rest of the changes cover functionality and usability.

Finally, there is a more powerful ARM 9 processor in all the new additions to the range, which makes the user interface even quicker and smoother to use than before. Bluesound quotes a 20 per cent rise in speed (and a 50 per cent reduction in power consumption), which you'll see through the likes of shorter indexing and load times.

**Listening to feedback, Bluesound has decided to redesign the range from the ground up, offering a more streamlined look with new features and a few new additions to the range. This design feels much more grown up**

range from the ground up, offering a more streamlined look with new features and a few new additions to the range to boot.

### Many changes

This means Bluesound's offering now comprises the Node 2 streamer (£430), the Pownode 2 streamer/amplifier (£700), the Vault 2 music server and CD ripper (£1000), and the Pulse Mini (£420), Pulse Flex (£270) and the original Pulse (£600) wireless speakers.

The Pulse joins the 2.1 Duo speaker package (£900) from last year as the only products to make a return this year without

For example, there are now both optical and analogue inputs across the range for connecting digital and legacy sources for multi-room playback, a subwoofer out for adding more bass and a built-in headphone amp for private listening.

### Go with the glow

Bluetooth aptX is now built in as standard (previously you had to use a dongle), the USB input is higher powered for driving any hard drive you've got, and a new wi-fi chipset ensures a faster, more stable connection to the devices you choose not to hardwire.

Set-up remains the same as last year - a web-based operation that could be a touch simpler if only it was integrated into the free iOS/Android app. Each speaker has to be set up individually on to your network rather than any instant Sonos-like pairing, but at least it's something you have to do only once.

When everything is online, the play/mute button, which sits in the middle of the top-mounted touch controls, will glow blue to show you're ready to go.

### A perfect little ripper...

**The Vault 2 can rip and store your CD collection without needing a computer**



The £1000 Vault 2 is Bluesound's new all-in-one music streamer and CD ripper, offering a 2TB hard drive for ripping and storing your CD collection in bit-perfect lossless FLAC - no computer required.

It will combine this with any other music on your network for seamless streaming of your library via the Bluesound app, or you can hook it up to an existing system via its stereo outs. You can even download new high-res music from the HighResAudio online store direct on to the Vault's hard drive.

### No flicking between screens

Each speaker on the network will show up automatically within the app, with easily labelled options for grouping them together and so on.

It will also help you to pull in music from NAS drives on the same network, and is capable of playing back files up to 24-bit/192kHz, as well as accessing some of the most popular streaming services, including Spotify, Rdio, Deezer, Tidal and Qobuz.

FLAC files on our MusicM8 NAS are indexed quickly and accurately, and show up with associated artwork under the local sources section of the app, with streaming services showing up just underneath.



**It's pricey, but if you're looking for a multi-room system that's flexible, will support a high-resolution library and sounds excellent, it's a consideration worth making**

**Pulse £600**

Ready to go? When everything is up and running, the play button on the touch controls will glow blue

**Pulse Mini £420**

**Power Node 2 £700**

Connecting the parts is straightforward, but would be a touch simpler with an app

Spotify works via Spotify Connect, but the rest of the apps we test show up within Bluesound's app itself, so there's no flicking backwards and forwards between screens.

The majority of the work behind Bluesound's second generation has been spent on improving things that needed it, and its sound quality certainly wasn't an area that needed addressing.

Thankfully that means it's largely been left well alone, which is no bad thing - we loved the sound of the original Bluesound and that sentiment remains with the new generation.

We set up a system comprising a Node 2, Powernode 2, Pulse and Pulse Mini and find the individual components work seamlessly together - even over an entirely wireless network. Playback is snappy and lag free, with grouped speakers playing simultaneously without any delay.

We've already given the Node 2 a five-star review, and revisiting it for the full system review reminds us just why. It's as expressive as it is subtle, able to pick out fine detail and give real depth and insight to instruments and vocals alike.

### **Rough and ready**

That's not to say it's a soft touch - turn up the tempo and the Node 2 is able to jump straight in with energy and enthusiasm, offering a punchy but refined performance across the board.

Ideally, we would take a touch more attack when tracks really get rough and ready, but with the level of musicality and insight on offer, it's a compromise we're willing to take.

On top of the improvements Bluesound has introduced across the range, the

Powernode 2 has also seen a slight change to its specifications, in that it now has a bigger amplifier and a larger power supply than before. This means it can now deliver 60W per channel into 8 Ohms - up a full 10W on last year's model.

It picks up where the Node 2 left off, showing a similar level of subtlety and agility, but with some added bite, which we find just slightly lacking from the streamer.

It's a balanced presentation and the clarity is second to none. Whether we're

**Node 2 £430**





## In detail...



### 1 Sub out

If you want more from the low end, both the Powernode 2 and Node 2 models offer the option of adding a subwoofer

### 2 USB input

You can connect a hard drive full of music to any one of your Bluesound components and access it on every Bluesound device around the home

### 3 Speaker terminals

The Powernode 2 is an amp and streamer in one, so you need only to hook it up to a pair of speakers and you're ready to go

### 4 Touch controls

This year's Bluesound features touch-sensitive controls for the first time. We find them responsive enough to replace physical controls

listening to Beethoven or Beyonce, the Powernode 2 can cater its character to suit.

What's really nice here though, is how the Powernode 2 handles dynamics. It is capable of conveying real differences between the softer and more powerful sections of the music, moving between the two with a level of fluidity and confidence that makes it such an insightful listen.

For £700, it's one of our favourite parts of the system, delivering a spacious and exciting presentation that is eager to please.

### Rich and full-bodied

Moving to the wireless speakers and a play through of *Seven Nation Army* by The White Stripes reveals the Pulse to be as rich and full bodied as we remember, offering up a detailed, powerful performance that delivers real weight to the punching bassline without ever becoming sluggish.

That said, if we had to choose between the two, we might just prefer its little brother. The new Pulse Mini might not be as capable of the same level of room-filling sound but there's a touch more refinement there, with a tonal balance that's a little more neutral.

The midrange is clear and articulate, with a treble that sings, even at volume, and though its low end is no match for the powerful Pulse, it's far from lacking, with agility and punch in spades.

Though we didn't get to test it here due to its slightly later release date, we feel it's worth mentioning the Pulse Flex – the range's smallest speaker – and its optional rechargeable battery.

### Worth considering

This battery brings a real flexibility to your multi-room setup possibilities, giving you the further option to take a speaker outside into the garden, for example. Sonos should take note.

We're big fans of the new Bluesound range. It sounds as good as ever, with some well-judged improvements and great new additions that make it a stronger proposition than ever.

Price will be a consideration – it's a little more costly than much of the competition – but if you're looking for a multi-room system that's flexible, will support a high-resolution library and sounds excellent, it's a consideration worth making.

### TECH SPECS

**Power** 60W/channel (Powernode 2) 80W (Pulse) 60W (Pulse Mini) **Formats** MP3, AAC, WMA, WMA lossless, OGG, FLAC, ALAC, WAV, AIFF **Supports** Up to 24-bit/192kHz **Inputs** 1 x USB, 1 x Toslink/3.5mm (except Pulse) 1 x optical (Pulse & Node 2 only) 1 x ethernet (Node 2 only) 1 x RCA 1 x coaxial **Output** 1 x sub out (Node 2 & Powernode 2 only), 1 x 3.5mm headphone jack (except Pulse) **Bluetooth** Yes, aptX **Supported services** Spotify, Tidal, Rdio, Qobuz, Deezer, Napster, TuneIn Radio

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Improved design and build; better features; fine detail; strong product range

**AGAINST** App could be a touch more intuitive to keep up with the best

**VERDICT** The best-sounding multi-room system just got even better



For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit [whathifi.com](http://whathifi.com)

## REVIEWER'S NOTES... GETTING TO KNOW THE BLUESOUND GENERATION 2

**1** These look different from last year's models – but we like it. The Node 2 and Powernode 2 fit on our rack much easier

**2** Getting the system onto our wi-fi network is straightforward, but building the process into the app would be a nice touch

**3** We're happy to see Bluetooth is built in this year, and aptX too. It gives the system greater flexibility when you need it

**4** There's a headphone jack and dedicated headphone amp too, giving you the option for personal listening sessions

**5** Wow! This is a great sounding system, with high-res support too. The Powernode 2 is a highlight – for £700 it's superb

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**WHAT HI-FI?**



BRONZE 2 - WHATHIFI.COM - JULY 2015

**BRONZE 2**  
monitoraudio.com

 **MONITOR AUDIO**



Dali Zensor 1 AX | Stereo speakers | £450

# All powered up for the modern age

A decade ago, there would have been little use for the Dali Zensor 1 AX powered stereo speakers. They would have found a niche, perhaps, but it would have been tiny. Now, however, it seems the time of the powered speaker may be here. That, at least, is what the Danish speaker manufacturer is hoping. And it might just be on to something - because the Zensor 1 AX is a good plan, well executed.

## Straight from the source

Now that smart devices are everywhere and vast tracts of the world's population are used to carrying their music with them wherever they go, having a simple way of playing those tracks to a decent standard and without fuss makes more and more sense.

Now, a student leaving home for the first time can pack a relatively small box, stick their smartphone in their pocket and have all they require for their musical entertainment. Someone who wants to be able to listen to a decent stereo system from the same speakers that will offer almost immeasurably better sound for their TV than the flatscreen can provide has a solution. And those people who stream BBC iPlayer, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video or whatever to their PC can have a pair of speakers that will provide sound to do justice to the detailed pictures they get.

## Features and accessories

The Zensor 1 AXs, then, are a pair of Zensor 1 speakers that will stand alone as a system, with just a source for company. Inside the left-channel speaker lies an amplifier that supplies the 2 x 50W power to run both speakers. If you want to hard-wire a source, there is a 3.5mm auxiliary input and an optical digital socket. For the streamers there is Bluetooth, including the best-option aptX codec for those sources that can take advantage of it. The speakers come with a power-cord and speaker cable to connect to the right-hand speaker. And there's a remote control to cover the major functions.

The light on the front of the left-hand speaker shows which input is being used: green for analogue, orange for digital, blue (naturally) for Bluetooth.

And that should be sufficient for most requirements - a traditional-looking pair of speakers with a modern purpose. As traditional speakers, though, they should be placed on solid stands for best results.



Though traditional in appearance, the Dalis are fully modern in their application

As the AXs are Zensor 1s with amplification added, it should come as little surprise the sound is familiar Dali. Which means what you get is a fast, tight musicality that will get your toes tapping. We listen first via the 3.5mm input, and the sound is detailed and balanced, the soundstage impressively open.

Treble and midrange are nicely articulated, with each instrument easily distinguishable, and vocals clear. Nothing stands out in the mix - just as it should be.

## Bass in proportion

These are pretty diminutive boxes, so you shouldn't be expecting anything huge in the way of bass reproduction, but what you get is tight and accurate, and in keeping with the fun, sprightly nature of the sound.

Should you feel the need for more bass kick, however, there is a sub-out socket to connect to the subwoofer of your choice. Something to consider, perhaps, if you're connecting your TV to the Zensor 1 AXs and want some extra movie welly.

A switch to streaming via Bluetooth brings a noticeable reduction in sound quality, with music seeming thinner. That, though, is a shortcoming in the streaming technology, not anything to do with the Dalis. We are caught out for a while when trying to change Bluetooth source, as we can't connect the new smartphone, but the manual soon puts us straight. After that, connection is as simple as it had been first time out.

Connectivity is good, and includes the aptX Bluetooth codec for streaming purposes



These speakers are quite happy being placed close to a rear wall - indeed, the bass can benefit from such positioning if you're careful. That also means that the Zensor 1 AXs can serve very well as PC speakers - although they are fairly substantial for such a purpose. They may be small hi-fi speakers but hi-fi speakers they certainly are, so make sure you've got the desk space to accommodate them.

Do the AXs give a better sound than the basic Zensor 1s connected to a standalone amplifier? No - a Marantz PM6005 for £300 will undoubtedly do a better job than the amplification housed in the AXs. But this little pair of powered speakers is certainly more convenient, and the sound they provide is more than enjoyable enough for us to recommend them without hesitation. If their convenience suits your needs, you won't go far wrong with the Zensor 1 AXs.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Convenience; fast, articulate, enjoyable sound; decent connectivity

**AGAINST** Small cabinets mean bass isn't huge

**VERDICT** Dali has hit on a very neat and flexible solution to what is an increasing need. It's good idea, well executed

## Also consider

**KEF Egg**  
£350 ★★★★★

These fun-looking desktops sound beautifully balanced - enough to win an Award (see p117).







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**LG OLED TV**



LG EG960V  
JUNE 2015



LG EG960V  
MAY 2015



LG EG960V  
JUNE 2015



LG EC970V

Model shown EG960V

**Chord Mojo | DAC | £400**

# Minor Chord creates harmony

**Does anyone need** a DAC with an upper sampling-rate limit of 768kHz? We seriously doubt it. But get past that headline-grabbing spec and it's obvious that the Mojo could be the perfect solution for those who crave Chord's £1400 Hugo but have stuttered at the hefty price. The name is short for 'Mobile Joy'. Quite.

## Shape-shifter

We're not so positive when we first take it out of the box. It feels oddly shaped and we miss Chord's traditional extravagant detailing. Such things have been discarded to meet the entry-level (by the company's usual standards) price point.

It takes us a while to get used to the minimal control layout. Three ball-like buttons take care of power and volume. There's no display as such, but the power button lights up in different colours depending on the sampling rate of the input signal (red for 44.1kHz, green for 96kHz, pink for DSD). Similarly, the volume buttons change colour according to gain level.

## Small, but well connected

The Mojo is a small unit, with a footprint barely larger than a credit card, yet Chord has found space for a good range of connections. There's (micro) USB, optical and coax, though the latter takes the form of a 3.5mm jack rather than the usual RCA or BNC, and a second USB connection for charging only. The inputs are auto-sensing, with USB taking priority followed by coax. Outputs are limited to a pair of 3.5mm jacks.

Build quality is terrific. Despite the minimal detailing, the Mojo feels like a solid chunk of metal. Its aircraft-grade aluminium casing is beautifully machined and finished to an extremely high standard.

At the moment only black is available, but we wouldn't be surprised if a silver option appeared at some point.

Fresh out of the box, the Mojo needs a minimum of 10 hours of charging, and gets hot doing so. Once fully charged it should run for around eight hours, depending on the headphones and volume levels used.

And this a fabulous performer. We listen to Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions* on DSD and are gripped from the unmistakable opening bars of *Too High* right through to the end of the album. There's plenty of detail here, and the kind of insight into the recording that nothing we've heard beneath the Hugo can better.



## USE IT WITH

### Grado 325e

Like the Chord, these agile, musical on-ears take their music seriously - seriously enough to be Award winners (see p85)

This is one way to enjoy the benefits of top-end tech without paying top-end cash



But it's not the excellent resolution that impresses us most. It's the Mojo's ability to organise all that information into a cohesive and musical whole that makes it stand out from the competition. It delivers the hard-charging rhythm of *Higher Ground* brilliantly, communicating the song's unstoppable momentum with warmth, solidity and real enthusiasm.

## Power and subtlety

Mozart's *Piano Concerto No.12* (24-bit/192kHz) confirms the Mojo's convincing tonal balance and reveals a surefooted handling of dynamics. It can convey power and scale but has the finesse to honour the subtler passages too. Poor recordings (and sources) will be easy to spot, but this DAC won't go out of its way to be nasty.

We think Chord has produced yet another winner here. The Mojo offers a large slice of the Hugo's performance for a fraction of the cost. Even at £400, we have to conclude that it's a bargain.

## In detail



The connections on the side include two micro-USB ports - one for playback (on the left), the other purely for charging



The volume controls change colour depending on the volume level, as does the power button to indicate the input signal's sampling rate

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Informative, subtle and dynamic sound; rhythmic drive; good build and finish; portable

**AGAINST** Runs warm and gets hot when charging the battery

**VERDICT** The Mojo delivers much of the sound of the £1400 Hugo at a fraction of the price

## Needs to beat

**Audiolab M-DAC £600 ★★★★★**

The M-DAC is a larger desktop alternative with a great display. It can't match the Mojo for sound quality though







Naim ND5 XS | Streamer | £2250

## A brilliant streamer by any other Naim

**Streamers may be** the new kit in town, but Naim has an advantage after getting into the game early. If you want true high-fidelity music from a multi-talented streamer, it remains one of the best in the business, as the ND5 XS proves.

### Startling precision

With native Tidal support now added to its long list of features, the ND5 XS is a capable streamer no matter what kind of music you throw at it. Feed it well-recorded, high-resolution files, however, and it shines.

Kate Bush's *50 Words For Snow* (in 24-bit/96kHz) bursts through with confidence and authority like no other. Each lilt and inflection of her vocals is enunciated with startling precision. It's a stunningly balanced and dynamic presentation, with seemingly no limit to the highs and lows it can reach.

The treble is rounded off a little at the very top to combat any undue brightness. However, it's not at the cost of any excitement or detail; Nina Simone is still able to belt her vocals out and Tom Waits' rasp is intact. The bass performance is taut and textured – satisfyingly deep, while retaining an energetic and nimble character.

While the Naim is revealing enough to show up a poor-quality recording, its smooth touch will soften the blow.

### Carefully-controlled soundstage

The ND5 XS delivers delicacy and muscle when needed. Timing is precise, with every instrument working cohesively in a carefully-controlled soundstage. The Naim takes Radiohead's challenging arrangement of *15 Step* in its stride. Snappy and tightly



woven, it's a toe-tapping performance. The ND5 XS has an effortless quality to it and, given the appropriate partnering equipment, it flourishes.

Naim's sturdy black chassis, minimalist design and crystal clear display have an elegant, premium-quality feel to them. The supplied remote control looks smart and feels natural to use, with buttons laid out logically and the menu responding instantly. Track information is sharp and easy to read on the Naim's punchy display.

But for the complete experience, we'd recommend Naim's slick iOS/Android app. It's perfect for scrolling through vast libraries of music stored across multiple sources. Switching between sources, queueing playlists and choosing radio stations becomes utterly intuitive when using a tablet's large and speedy interface.

### Decent spread of connections

As for specification, this Naim is kitted out with just about every streaming feature worth having. The Tidal update joins Spotify Connect and vTuner internet radio, opening up a world of music and radio stations for your enjoyment.

The ND5 XS is a fully UPnP player, meaning it will play just about anything. Simply connect the ND5 XS to your home network (it's stable across wi-fi and wired),

and you'll be able to stream all popular file formats up to 24-bit/192kHz high-res, including DSD64 tracks.

It also has aptX Bluetooth on board for streaming directly from a smartphone or tablet. You'll find a decent

spread of analogue and digital connections, too: optical and two coaxial inputs (one with BNC plug), a pair of RCA analogue outputs, DIN connector and BNC digital output on the back panel. The USB port will charge your phone and play stored songs from an Apple device or a memory stick.

### Forward-thinking approach

Everything about Naim's streamer has been planned to be seamless, a forward-thinking experience. Coupled with its brilliant sonic performance, this ND5 XS is a must-have if you're after a truly high-end streamer that can do it all.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Stunningly clear and precise sound quality; sturdy build and design; excellent spec

**AGAINST** Power supply upgrades aren't cheap

**VERDICT** A fully featured, insightful and captivating streamer that does it all – one of the best high-end streamers we've ever tested

### Needs to beat

**Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx £2000 ★★★★★**

Old-fashioned looking and not quite as slick as the Naim, but this Award-winning Cyrus delivers an incredibly capable performance



### System builder total build £7400

**Stereo amplifier**  
**Naim Supernait 2**  
**£2750 ★★★★★**

You'll want a partnering Naim amplifier to match the streamer's tonal balance, and this powerful Supernait 2 does the job perfectly



**Stereo speakers**  
**ATC SCM19 £2000 ★★★★★**

These big ATC speakers are firm favourites in our testing rooms for their stunning transparency and insight. They will pair up beautifully with the Naim separates



**Tablet**  
**Apple iPad Air 2 £400 ★★★★★**

Using the slick new Naim app is the best way to navigate around your vast music library, and it's even better on a tablet with a large and speedy interface, such as Apple's elegant Air 2





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performance.

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Bowers & Wilkins

Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge+ | Smartphone | £540

# Plus-sized Samsung has the Edge

It's been a good year for Samsung Mobile. After falling short of the competition a little, everything seems to have come together with the Galaxy S6. The plastic and faux leather has been replaced by metal and glass, and it is backed up by a performance that can't be argued with.

The S6 put Samsung back on the map, but its curvier sibling, the S6 Edge, has been the surprise hit of 2015. It delivers excellent performance alongside dashing good looks, and won the full five stars in the process. It showed people were prepared to pay a premium for a good-looking phone, and Samsung couldn't make them quick enough.

**Samsung has delivered the Edge experience to those wanting a larger display - the result is the Galaxy S6 Edge+. Great news for big-screen fans - it is every bit as good as its smaller sibling**

Samsung has decided the S6 Edge is worthy of a screen boost, delivering the Edge experience to those wanting a larger display. The result is the Galaxy S6 Edge+, and the great news for big-screen fans is it's every bit as good as its smaller sibling.

## Gorgeously sharp

The screen is one of the biggest changes in the S6 Edge+, with a jump in size from 5.1in to a Galaxy Note-matching 5.7in. The bright Quad HD Super AMOLED display remains, with a screen resolution of 2560 x 1440 with 518ppi (pixels per inch). This is a slight drop from the regular Edge at 577ppi, but still higher than the iPhone 6 Plus (401ppi).

There's a small loss of subtlety in images compared with the regular Edge, but it's still a gorgeously sharp and precise picture. Colours are rich, while blacks go deeper than you'll find on the likes of the iPhone 6 Plus or even last year's Note 4.

Skin-tones look natural, textures are portrayed with depth and contrast is strong, with whites doing well to really pierce through dark scenes. They have a slight blue tinge to them off-axis, but it doesn't take away from the overall experience. Whether you're streaming video or watching downloaded movies, the picture on the S6 Edge+ certainly won't disappoint.

## Two-handed approach

Elsewhere, this is just a supersized version of the Edge. Of course you're going to need slightly bigger pockets to accommodate the extra size (154 x 76 x 7mm), plus it's around 20g heavier, but Samsung has nailed the screen-to-bezel ratio so it doesn't feel big in your hand. Despite having a larger screen, it's smaller than the iPhone 6 Plus.

This size does mean some tasks are two-handed - even large hands will struggle to stretch the thumb to the very top of the screen from the bottom.

The premium glass and metal finish remains, with a choice of black or gold at launch. The glass is as much of a fingerprint magnet as it was on its smaller sibling, but we'll take that over a plastic finish any day.

The unique curved-edge design is obviously a big feature here, but this time it's a little more useful. As well as the People Edge UI, which displays favourite contacts down your 'active' edge, there is also the Apps Edge. This brings up a

selection of five customisable app shortcuts, which save time over going to the homescreen and clicking a shortcut.

## It's no slouch

The handset's unibody design means there's no microSD card slot, with onboard storage options available in 32 and 64GB varieties. That's plenty for most, but power users will mourn the loss of the 128GB version that the original Edge offered.

The S6 Edge+ is no slouch. It keeps the same 64-bit octa-core Exynos 7420 chipset found in the S6 and S6 Edge, but RAM has been upped to 4GB from 3GB to keep things running smoothly. Swiping through menus, launching apps and playing graphic-heavy games are no problem. There's no waiting as you switch between windows, and webpages load without a stutter.

The S6 Edge+ has received a suitable battery boost to help cope with that bigger screen, boasting a 3400mAh battery compared with 3000mAh on the Edge. We get through a working day without needing to charge the phone, and expect around 10 hours with a reasonable usage.

As with the rest of the S6 family, the Edge+ benefits from Samsung's fast-charging system. We went from empty to 19 per cent in 10 minutes, and a full charge took just under the claimed 90 minutes.

**You'll need bigger pockets - and bigger hands. The size of the S6 Edge+ makes some tasks a two-handed affair**



**USE IT WITH  
AKG Y50**

These award-winning folding portable headphones are fantastic sounding

Wireless charging is also on board (though you'll have to buy the charger separately) and is reportedly 33 per cent faster than with the S6. A full charge will take 120 minutes, but it's still no slouch.

The Galaxy S6 Edge+ offers high-resolution music playback up to 24-bit/192kHz, and unsurprisingly, sounds very much like its smaller sibling. Play anything with a bit of get up and go, and there's plenty of punch and attack to deliver an up-front and exciting performance.

## Firing shot after shot

There's no shortage of detail, with insight to subtler tracks and the dynamic knowhow to uncover the differences between the soft and loud parts of tracks, not to mention the connection between them. It's a refined sound, and tonally balanced.

A new feature in the S6 Edge+ is the UHQ Upscaler, which Samsung promises is able to upscale MP3s to the quality of high-res audio. It adds a touch more clarity, boosts volume and gives the treble slightly more bite, but at the expense of a little subtlety. It's worth playing around, but we'd leave the processing modes well alone.

The camera on the S6 Edge+ remains the same as that on the S6 and S6 Edge. It's 16MP, with optical image stabilisation on the main camera and a 5MP wide-angle lens on the front-facing one. Both lenses offer f/1.9 aperture for good low-light shots and 4K video capture returns too, at 30fps.

It's really quick to launch from a double tap on the home button (0.7 seconds, if you're interested) and that speed stays with the camera throughout.

Autofocus is snappy, as is processing, meaning you can easily fire shot after shot without delay. Results are great too - we keep it on auto mode and find it to be fine for most shots, automatically switching to HDR mode when needed and delivering good results in varying situations.

Colours are true to life and there's plenty of detail to images, even on zoomed-in shots. Bright sunlight can occasionally overexpose lighter details, but it's largely reliable. Even low-light snaps fare well, delivering clear images with minimal noise.

Those wanting more control of their snaps can opt for the Pro manual mode, for tweaking things such as ISO, white balance







Despite a slight drop in pixel density, the Edge+ retains the gorgeous picture of the S6 Edge

and shutter speed. Other options include Selective Focus for giving a DSLR-like depth of field to your shots, and a Panorama option for wide landscape images.

The S6 Edge+ also brings with it a few extra options, such as the Collage Video feature, which pieces together four six-second clips into one collage, and a Live Video streaming feature, which allows you to broadcast live to selected contacts via a YouTube link.

We find this works well, with optical image stabilisation helping keep video smooth and steady. The video link has just a slight delay and, depending on how many contacts you want to include, sending out the invitations can take a minute or so.

You can see any 'likes' you receive in real time, but unlike Twitter's Periscope app you won't see how many viewers you've got or any comments you receive until after.

Staying with video, it's only Full HD footage that benefits from optical image stabilisation - meaning 4K video goes without - while the slow-motion and fast-motion options will record only in a maximum of 720p.

### Desirable looks

The overall premise of the Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge+ is simple - to bring a bigger screen to the Edge experience. It's still as desirable in both looks and performance, with a few additions that make sure the big screen offering is as good as the smaller one.

It's undeniably expensive, but if you have the budget to stretch to it or can find a decent deal on contract, there's no doubt that this is the big screen phone to opt for right now.

### In detail



**Fingerprint scanner** Samsung's improved scanner is at play on the Edge+, making it quicker and easier to use than ever



**Camera** The 16MP snapper is a great performer and works particularly well in low light, thanks to its f/1.9 aperture



**Charging** The S6 Edge+ features Samsung's fast-charging system, meaning the phone goes from empty to full in 90 minutes

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Gorgeous screen; premium build; great video performance; punchy, exciting audio with high-res support; strong camera

**AGAINST** Expensive; no expandable storage

**VERDICT** A superb performer, and the big-screen phone to opt for right now

### Also consider

#### Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge ★★★★★

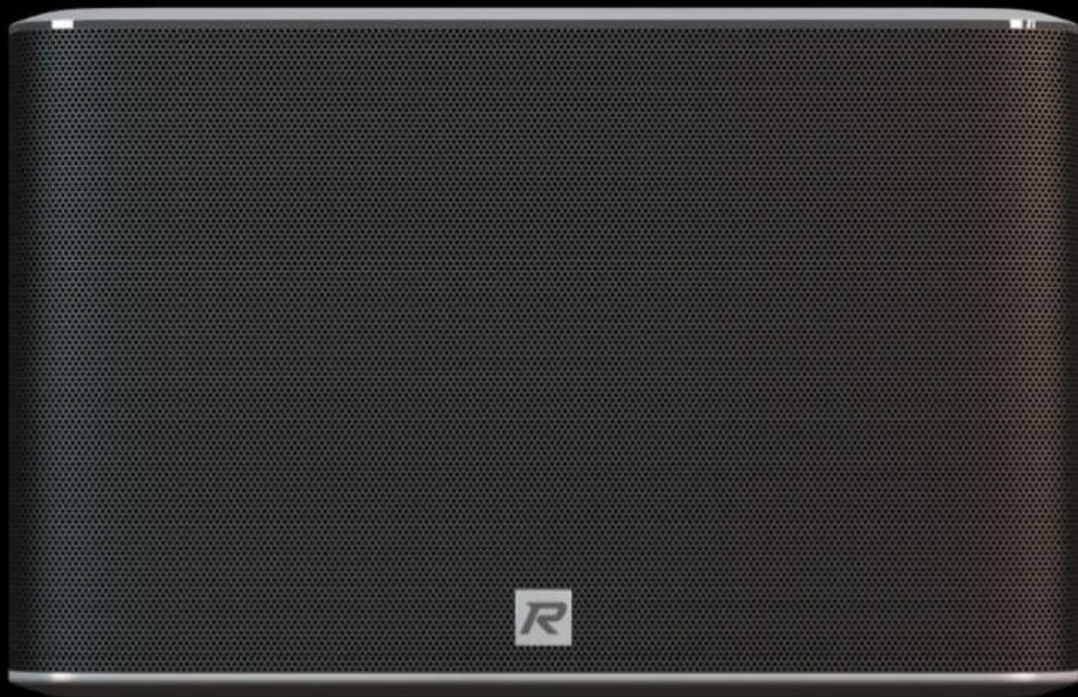
If you prefer a smaller screen, the S6 Edge might be more your thing





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# Her name is Rio and she dances in the lounge, kitchen and study.



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Rio - Duran Duran

Coming soon to **John Lewis ROBERTS**

Geneva AeroSphère Large | **Wireless speaker** | £650

## Sphere of influence

**It's not often** we find ourselves throwing our arms around a wireless speaker. But the Geneva AeroSphère Large is so soft it leaves us with little option but to humour that impulse.

Underneath the soft exterior is a cabinet comprising three separate acoustic chambers, which house an impressive driver set-up of two 25mm tweeters, a pair of 10cm midrange/woofers and an up-firing 15cm subwoofer, powered by dedicated amplifiers. The positioning of the subwoofer in particular makes the speaker less fussy about where you place it in the room than other orientations.

### Find the right balance

In terms of connectivity, the AeroSphère supports AirPlay, DLNA and high-quality aptX Bluetooth and has a 3.5mm input, meaning compatibility with any device on which you'd store music. Want to play CDs or radio? Geneva has that covered with the AeroSphère Base, though

Underneath the AeroSphère's soft exterior is an impressive driver set-up, powered by dedicated amplifiers



The AeroSphère has great connectivity, and should be compatible with any device on which you'd store music

**We continue raiding our music library, telling ourselves we're testing its versatility. In reality, we're just enjoying listening to the AeroSphère**



### USE IT WITH

#### Geneva AeroSphère Large Stand (£150)

Performance-wise, the Geneva AeroSphère won't suffer much from being placed on a table or counter, especially given the app's versatility. However, it does look tidier with this minimalist stand

it isn't cheap at an extra £450. Want multi-room? You can also control multiple AeroSphère products - the AeroSphère Small is available at £350 - via the app.

We begin by placing the speaker on its stand (sadly not included, see left), but the AeroSphère will work fine on just about any surface in the house. We position it close to the wall, but the speaker configuration means you needn't be too fussy about how close you are to walls and furniture. The app will also help you find the right balance.

### Thrown in at the deep end

At £650, this isn't a penny pincher's choice, so we throw the AeroSphère in at the deep end with the second movement of Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No1 in B-flat Minor* as played by Daniil Trifonov and the Mariinsky Orchestra. And we are impressed.

The pizzicato strings opening the movement are rhythmically sprightly and set in open space that is soon shared by woodwind, brass and, of course, piano. There is more insight into each instrument than you might expect from a product like this, and a dynamic understanding that lets each part sing.

As the texture builds, the AeroSphère doesn't seem to be in awe. Feeding each

staccato note with decent attack, it also appears to have more space to give.

Over six-and-a-bit minutes, we hear the kind of dynamics, balance and organisation we wouldn't have dared expect from a wireless speaker at this price not long ago. It isn't quite at the Naim Mu-so's level, but nor is it in the region of the Mu-so's £900 price tag. Changing musical direction, we test the AeroSphère with La Dispute's *Hudsonville, MI 1956*. Electric guitars and drums are treated, unsurprisingly, with the same insight and expressiveness of the Mariinsky Orchestra.

### Bridging the gap

The rhythms are there in Jordan Dreyer's vocal, so often toeing the line between lyrics and performance poetry, as is the expression. As Dreyer's tone switches between apathy and anguish in almost schizophrenic fashion, the AeroSphère is there ready to act as conduit.

We continue raiding our library of music, trying everything from Frank Sinatra to FKA twigs. We tell ourselves we're testing the speaker's versatility, but in reality we're simply enjoying listening to the AeroSphère.

This isn't merely a victory for interior-design onepmanship. Geneva has succeeded in bridging the gap between kitchen-top mini speakers and our reigning, but expensive, king of wireless the Mu-so. The AeroSphère might be large, but we don't think many people would have trouble making space for it.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Impressive and far-reaching frequency range; rhythmic and expressive; striking design

**AGAINST** If you want that stand, you'll have to fork out an extra £150

**VERDICT** The Geneva AeroSphère Large is among the best-looking wireless speakers we've seen and one of the best we've heard. If £650 is your budget, this is a no brainer

### Also consider

#### Naim Mu-so (£900) ★★★★★

If you can stretch to the extra £250, the Mu-so is the closest to hi-fi quality we've heard in a wireless speaker.





Philips 32PFT5500 | Television | £300

# Smart, but caught out playing catch-up

**They don't make** them like this any more – at least, that's how it feels. It has been a very long time since we last had a screen this size in to test. We remember when 32 inches was considered relatively large. Now, flanked in our testing room by a pair of gargantuan 65-inchers, the Philips 32PFT5500 looks almost tablet-sized.

Powered by Android OS, it should at least be as smart as a tablet. Partnered with the company's Dual Core processor, the Philips promises fast and intuitive access to Netflix, YouTube, Spotify Connect, BBC iPlayer and Google Play, and (with what Philips refers to as Perfect Motion Rate) the most glorious of high-definition viewing.

## Slick simplicity

That level of slickness is certainly present in this TV's physical design. After we screw the screen to its minimalist stand, the set perches elegantly upon our rack. We like its no-frills tidiness and sophistication, essentially framing the picture with just a narrow black rim.

Set-up is similarly simple. Philips has included something called Micro Dimming technology, which analyses the picture and adjusts it accordingly, and the Pixel Plus HD engine is there to help optimise picture quality and contrast.

Fine-tuning is fairly inflexible, meaning we can't tune things to quite the level we'd like, but we have few complaints about the quality of the picture we end up with.

Flicking between high- and standard-definition daytime television, we discover there is a good amount of detail with each. Movement is also well tracked. With a repeat of *Top Gear*, the Philips feels relatively comfortable chasing the cars as they whizz around the circuit.

Contrast is decent as well, especially considering how restrictive we find the settings. The most vibrant colours are well represented and blacks are suitably dark. A

**The most vibrant colours are well represented and blacks are dark. A bit more subtlety and greater detail would be well received, though**

bit more subtlety would be well received, though – the amount of detail in things such as hair colour and shadows could be better.

## Background information

We switch to the BBC's *Africa* with David Attenborough, and a scene of elephants fraternising at night highlights the Philips' frailties when it comes to distinguishing between blacks and dark greys. The foreground is fine, but we get little clue as to the backdrop. It's relatively minor at this



We can't quibble with the price – we're just hoping a software update is imminent

price, and doesn't have an especially detrimental effect, but it's worth pointing out that greater insight is available elsewhere.

## Sight matches sound

Playing Blu-ray and DVD offers the same relative picture quality as the respective HD/SD TV broadcasts, as it does with sound.

We don't expect a flatscreen to facilitate the most dynamic or expressive listening experience, but there is enough detail and feeling behind the Philips. Soundtracks are

musical enough – you could happily watch *Later... With Jools Holland* without a soundbar – and the sound doesn't harden or become harsh with bellowing voices or the rev of an engine either, as can often be the case when the small try to sound big.

Sadly, the user experience doesn't quite stand up to the picture and sound quality when your media is playing. We stream videos from YouTube with ease, for example, but can't get a peep from BBC iPlayer – we get as far as clicking on the programme we want

The neatly arranged remote is smart-savvy, not too big and sits cosily in your hand



to watch, but to no avail. The general slowness of the interface – the TV guide in particular is in no rush to get ready – probably simply lacks a software update, but as it is it's frustrating enough to temper the things Philips have done right here.

## A hard time with the software

That software issue is where this set loses out. If it had an effective update, we could recommend this television. Because in terms of viewing experience, the 32PFT5500 is a decent all rounder at a reasonable price.

## Rating ★★☆☆☆

**FOR** Rich, appealing colour palette; decent contrast; sleek design

**AGAINST** Lack of subtlety, especially in deep blacks; software bugs; difficult to fine-tune

**VERDICT** We're mostly pleased with the picture but software bugs hold back a lot of potential

## Also consider

**Panasonic TX-40CS520**  
**£380 ★★★★★**

If you've the extra space, this 40in has loads of detail and a well-judged colour balance.



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Crosley Cruiser | Turntable | £80

# Cruiser isn't up to scratch

You've probably seen a Crosley Cruiser turntable on the high street. Whether it's at John Lewis, sitting next to a wall of freshly pressed records at Urban Outfitters, or online at Amazon, these vintage-looking portables are very popular indeed.

They look fun - the retro-style suitcase is certainly eye-catching. And the plug-and-play nature of the Cruiser is appealing to first-time buyers. But are they any good?

## Selling like hotcakes

The Cruiser is as plug-and-play as a turntable gets, and it's easy to get enamoured by the world of vinyl through such a trendy package and easy-to-use product.

If you're really serious about playing records, though, we can't recommend this Crosley. For one, the tinny sound quality is hardly worth paying the sub-£100 price. More worryingly, though, the Cruiser will wear your records down faster than a typical turntable, due to an unusually high tracking weight on the cartridge. The weight cannot be adjusted either.

Looking at the Cruiser, it's easy to see why they're selling like hot cakes. We like the suitcase design and its bright finish. Our review sample comes in orange, but you can choose from black, turquoise, red, pink, blue and many more. The wooden and leatherette build is surprisingly robust, too.

## Weight issues

This is a fully portable system, with two speakers (driven by a 3W amp) built into the case - you can see the grilles on the front of the unit. Once open (the locks are satisfyingly sturdy), the Cruiser has all the necessities - a tonearm, cartridge and mat all placed neatly inside.

The tonearm is securely held, and while the build quality is mostly decent for the money, attention to detail is poor. There's a lot of play in the arm bearing, which doesn't inspire confidence.

The Cruiser will play your discs at three speeds - 33½, 45 and 78rpm. On the turntable, you'll find a dial for power and controlling the volume. It's responsive and smooth to operate.

Around the back, you'll find the power plug, a pair of RCA analogue outputs to feed the turntable into your main hi-fi system, and a 3.5mm input for plugging in iPods and music players. There's a 3.5mm headphone jack near the volume control too. It's a decent spread of features for a budget turntable that does it all.

At this price, we aren't expecting a fully rounded performance from the Crosley, but the bright and tinny sound is still a disappointment. We play a range of records from Duran Duran's *Notorious* and

The Crosley will look lovely on your shelf, but sadly it won't do your records much good



## Heavy metal

We measured the downforce on the Crosley Cruiser's cartridge at just over 7g (typically, it's around 2.5g on most decks). Such a heavy weight will increase wear on your records. Unfortunately, there's no scope for adjustment on the arm at all.

ABBA's *Should I Laugh Or Cry* single to Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*.

Voices are shrill, and there's not enough resolution to hear deeper into the mix. There's a tune in there, but no enjoyment to be had from it. It's the same presentation whether you're listening to vinyl or playing a Spotify playlist through your iPhone 6S. Through headphones, the sound is hazy and noisy - we actually prefer listening through the speakers.

## Making vinyl accessible

A bit more body and weight, and things would be better. But the built-in speakers are hardly capable of delivering a detailed and dynamic sound, let alone doing better than the worst flatscreen TV speakers.

The eye-catching retro suitcase comes in a range of colours, including orange



It's a shame, as we really wanted to like this portable turntable - it's such a lovely looking thing. We wanted the Crosley to perform well; as an idea, it's great, and anything that makes vinyl more accessible and gets people interested is a good thing in our books. But the product has to deliver.

The Cruiser's tracking weight is a serious issue, and the turntable's speakers are a disappointment. Both you and your record collection deserve better.

## Rating ★★☆☆☆

**FOR** Appealing design and finish; easy to use; plenty of features included; affordable price

**AGAINST** Lack of detail; tinny, bright sound; build quality could be better

**VERDICT** It's a lovely idea, but this turntable should be kept away from your vinyl collection

## Also consider

**Pro-Ject Elemental**  
£150 ★★★★★

For a little more, you get a proper turntable experience. The Elemental sounds great and will do justice to your records







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Ruark R2 Mk3 | System | £400

# Sweet streams are made of this

**You don't get** many all-in-one systems of this calibre. The Ruark R2, now in its third iteration, remains a staunch favourite at *What Hi-Fi?* It's not just because it's beautifully designed, nor that it has an impressive set of features lurking beneath that sleek chassis. It's because the Mk3 is both a gorgeous-looking system and an effortlessly musical performer offering a richly detailed sound.

## A small unit with a big reach

For a unit that fits on top of your kitchen counter or bedside table, this R2 sounds admirably big and wide. The spacious soundstage is populated by a satisfyingly meaty and warm bassline, a soaring top end and a talented midrange that makes voices sound solid and intimate in the same breath. It's a captivating presentation. The richness is dominating, but a snappy handling of rhythm and a good sense of when notes start and stop prevents the R2 from ever sounding thick or sludgy.

The punchy rhythm gives a great deal of attack and wallop to songs. It also goes hand in hand with finesse and an agile delivery. Tom Waits's *God's Awful On Business* is handled with expertise, with the rasps and croaks in his deep, rumbling voice laid bare.

## Insightful delivery

Play Richie Kotzen's *You Can't Save Me* and you can feel the tension in the plucked strings and the impact of drums being hit. The amount of insight is impressive once you get past that rich tone.

That full-bodied presentation will suit all kinds of songs, although it's worth noting that the 3.5mm wired connection sounds a touch more solid and definite compared with Bluetooth-streamed songs. Radio



## The port that thinks for itself

Ruark gets clever with its 3.5mm headphone port, which remembers its last-used volume level - independent of the level of the main speakers. That makes it kind to your ears

stations have a great deal of weight and dynamics to them, with voices clear and focused. The R2 has a '3D sound' mode that makes the sound bigger and bolder, while still keeping the tonal balance in check. We'd recommend keeping it on.

## Ageless design

Ruark is a master at designing products that harmoniously straddle the line between modern and retro. The handcrafted wooden cabinet (walnut, white or black) and steel front panel fit together beautifully, the crisp OLED display further adding to the elegant and classy design. There are two 9cm drivers on either side of the display, and two small reflex ports underneath the unit.

The R2 comes with a tiny, slim remote control, but part of the system's charm is using the unit's RotoDial controller. It will change volume, switch sources, control playback and more. It's a joy to operate.

Gone is the iPod dock found on top of the Award-winning R2i; the R2 Mk3 is fully packed with the latest streaming features.



Ruark has gone for the small-and-simple approach for the tiny, slimline remote

Alongside FM, DAB and internet radio, the R2 features Spotify Connect, and the built-in wi-fi swiftly connects to your home network. Thanks to DLNA certification it will recognise any other music stored on the same network. There's also aptX Bluetooth.

Physical connections include a pair of analogue inputs, a USB type A port for charging your smartphone and for playing stick-stored files, and a 3.5mm jack for hardwiring music players.

A recent software upgrade also gives the R2 multi-room powers: you can link two R2s together using the instructions in the menu (albeit via a third-party app for now).

We'll be able to fully test multi-room once the dedicated app is released next year, but even without that feature the R2 Mk3 is one of the best all-in-one systems we've come across. It's a gorgeous-looking system that will fit into any home, and that lush, punchy sound is just so much fun to listen to. We want one.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Gorgeous sound quality; punchy rhythm; fluid and exciting dynamics; build and design; intuitive to use; extensive streaming features

**AGAINST** No dedicated app just yet

**VERDICT** Beautiful in design and performance, this all-in-one system is a delight

The spacious soundstage is populated by a satisfyingly meaty and warm bassline, a soaring top end and a talented midrange that makes voices simultaneously sound solid and intimate

Smooth curves and solid panels: elegant design and great build combine beautifully



## USE IT WITH Samsung Galaxy S6+

Our current favourite smartphone, this powerful device is one of the best-sounding for streaming music

## Needs to beat

**Denon D-M40DAB £350 ★★★★★**

Unlike the Ruark, the Denon is a classic micro system with a CD player and separate speakers, but no streaming. It sounds wonderful, though.



**Audiolab 8300A | Stereo amplifier | £900**

# Bring out the old – and ring in the new

The **Audiolab brand** was established on the extraordinary success of its first product, the 8000A integrated amplifier. Back in the early 1980s, this slim unit struck just the right chord with hi-fi buyers – its combination of quality build, sensible features and highly neutral sound proved a massive success.

The DNA of that original design has been retained through the company's subsequent designs, including the 8300A on test here. However, this isn't just some mild evolution. The 8300A is a completely new design that stays true to the original's engineering principles and aesthetics, but takes in the advantages of current thinking in electronic design and technology.

The core of the 8300A's new electrical design is its 75W-per-channel dual-mono power amplifier section. It is designed to be a highly linear, low-distortion performer into a wide range of speaker loads. The numbers seem to confirm this, as output rises to a claimed 115W into 4 ohms and maximum current delivery is a notable 15A.

## Characteristically solid

Build quality is as good as we've come to expect from Audiolab. The casework feels solid and is beautifully finished, in either the black of our review sample or silver. We particularly like the precise feel of the rotary controls and the remote – it's a classy system controller that feels good to use.

Around the back you'll find line-level inputs, including a balanced XLR option. There's also an adjustable moving magnet/moving coil phono stage for those who use a turntable. There are also two sets of speaker outputs to make biwiring possible.

This is the first time one of the brand's amplifiers has featured a display, which is useful for setting up the amp and making adjustments such as phono-stage gain or the length of standby mode. It's large and easy to read, even from a distance.

## Preparing to do Battle

We give the Audiolab a few days of running before we start to listen seriously. When we do, we pick a piece of music with wide dynamic extremes, Hans Zimmer's *The Battle* from the *Gladiator* OST, and this amp takes it all in its stride. There's plenty of

**This isn't just some mild evolution. The 8300A is a completely new design based on current thinking**

punch and the kind of heft at low frequencies most rivals don't get close to. The presentation is big-boned too, with a wide stereo sound stage populated with nicely layered, crisply focused instruments.

We're also impressed by the 8300A's tonal balance. It's as even as they come, refusing to add unnatural colour or drama to the sound. We listen to smaller scale recordings, from the likes of Eric Bibb and Satie, and are impressed with the way this amp renders tonal textures. Its presentation is very clean too, as if distortion levels are way lower than the norm.

Despite all this obvious talent we're not totally bowled over with the overall performance. Compared with alternatives

from the likes of Rega and Naim, the Audiolab is a little short in its sense of rhythmic drive. The 8300A doesn't communicate the changing momentum of a piece of music as well as we'd like. That means the initial build-up of tension in The Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall* isn't particularly obvious. Similarly, the sheer energy and drive in OutKast's *Hey Ya!* is diluted, meaning a slice of the song's sense of fun is lost.

It doesn't help that the amplifier isn't flawless when dealing with low-level dynamic shifts either. Nina Simone's vocals on the haunting *Strange Fruit* come through with less passion than we're used to.

## Phono call

The story is much the same through the phono stage. It's a decent effort, with low levels of noise and a good amount of insight, but also loses out on some of the solidity and authority of the line stages.

Make no mistake, the 8300A is an amplifier that can impress easily. Build is excellent and its large-scale sound gives it an edge over many rivals. It just doesn't have enough all-round sonic talent to gain an unreserved recommendation.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Big-boned presentation; plenty of muscle; clean and crisp sound; fine build and finish; sensible range of features

**AGAINST** The overall sound isn't the most engaging around

**VERDICT** The 8300A is a hugely capable and serious product but sacrifices a little too much fun for our tastes

## Also consider

**Rega Elex-R**  
**£900 ★★★★★**

Rega's Elex-R is a wonderfully musical performer that gets all the essentials right. This is our favourite amplifier at this price



## USE IT WITH Audiolab 8300CD

The obvious partner. This Audiolab CD player is hugely talented and equally well built. It has digital inputs too

Round the back, two sets of speaker outputs make it easy to biwire the speakers



The remote is classy and the main unit's fascia has a display – an Audiolab amp first



Monitor Audio Bronze B5 AV | 5.1 surround speaker package | £1500

## Bronze sets the new standard

**Hand-me-downs** have rarely been so appealing. When Monitor Audio upgraded its Award-winning Bronze home speaker package, it made sense to use technology from the company's pricier ranges. The B5 AV system comprises the new Bronze Centre, two Bronze FX surround speakers and Bronze W10 subwoofer (as do all Bronze packages) and a pair of Bronze 5 floorstanding speakers for front channels.

### Terrifically rhythmic

The technology upgrade centres on new C-CAM drivers (made of Ceramic-Coated Aluminium/Magnesium, a material originally developed for jet engine components). For the midrange and bass drivers, the stiffness and damping quality of that dished cone aids control and reduction in break-up. The drivers are also an inch smaller in diameter than previous models, helping reduce the speaker's overall footprint. The tweeter's C-CAM dome is gold-anodised for stiffness and also dampening, meaning the sound shouldn't harden at its highest frequencies.

We play *Taxi Driver* on Blu-ray and are immediately struck by the film's jazz accompaniment. Instruments are brilliantly organised and offered a generous amount of space in which to breathe, but most of all they are expressive and terrifically rhythmic. When Bernard Herrmann's score is realised like this, it highlights Robert de Niro's own

**The Bronze B5 AV feels comfortably in control without being restrained, delivering perilous thrill and slapstick humour with consummate ease**

improvisational delivery, giving purpose to the false starts and broken sentences.

The sound dates the film as much as the flared trousers, but the package doesn't hide behind that. Voices are warm and expressive, there is depth to sounds such as the fizz of Travis's Alka-Seltzer and attack to the gunshots. This is a reasonably priced speaker package, but that doesn't stop it exploring the nuances of a dejected, lonely film.

### Perilous thrill and slapstick humour

Changing tack with *ParaNorman*, the Bronze B5 AV is equally comfortable with the modern-day family-focused animation. The same characteristics of rhythm, detail and organisation are present as the zombies chase Norman and co through the woods, only now with a healthy injection of power.

The surround sound field is cohesive, and there's great tonal matching between the channels. They feel comfortably in control, without being restrained, delivering perilous thrill and slapstick humour with consummate ease.



With technology derived from the higher range, the Bronzes have raised the bar at this price

The results are much the same in stereo. We play LCD Soundsystem's *Sound Of Silver* album and, though still using an AV receiver, we remain impressed by the balance, dynamics and expressiveness that keep us hooked. If you're using these speakers for music as much as cinema, this may be where the depth and organisation of the Bronze 5 speakers trumps the Bronze 2-based alternative package most considerably.



The Bronze B5 AV system package includes the W10 subwoofer for an injection of power

You don't have to be Miss Marple to read the clues – we like this speaker package a lot. Monitor Audio's decision to hand down driver technology to its Bronze range has raised the standard. This package delivers a sound that is bold and capable of great subtlety and dynamics. Spend a couple of hours with the Bronze B5 AV and this may be the easiest £1500 you'll ever spend.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Great dynamics and musicality; enough punch for adventurous soundtracks

**AGAINST** Nothing of note

**VERDICT** By handing down technology from its more expensive ranges, Monitor Audio has raised the bar for its competitors

### Needs to beat

**Dali Zensor 1 5.1 £980 ★★★★★**

At £980, Dali offers another speaker package of all-round brilliance for those whose budgets won't stretch to a four-figure sum



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Samsung UE65JS8500 | 4K television | £3000

# Unpack a pixel-packing marvel

If you were tempted by our glowing review of Samsung's £6000 flagship UE65JS9500 TV last month, but weren't willing to break the bank to get it, then the UE65JS8500 could be just the TV for you. It belongs to the 'Series 8' range, one below the JS9500, but it shares a lot of its pros: a stunning 65in curved screen, Samsung's proprietary SUHD nano-crystal technology, and smarts more fruitful than an orchard.

It's a step up from other Samsung models we've seen, basically a bigger UE55JS8500 (£2600) and marginally better UE65JU7000 (£2750).

This screen is so impressive out of the box we're almost tempted to forego our routine THX Optimizer disc tests. We don't, of course, but the necessary changes are more a case of fine-tuning than drastic alteration.

## The captivating realism of 4K

Playing native 4K content, it's hard not to be glued to the screen. Threadlike lines and punch-packing colour eat up every pixel. Its devotion to detail, dramatic contrast and convincingly natural hues speak volumes about realism, while its motion-savvy delivery is smooth enough not to warrant much in the way of processing modes.

Even during relatively dull scenes - ones you might usually consider an opportune moment to put the kettle on - the Samsung looks interesting enough to string you along.

As with any 4K TV, the real challenge is upscaling lower-resolution content. We load up a Blu-ray of Neill Blomkamp's futuristic robot romp *Chappie* and the UE65JS8500 exhibits the same strengths. It remains faithful to Blomkamp's vision of the robotic do-gooders, with each mechanical detail as sharp as your eyes can see, their colourful patches and bright lights well judged too.

## Subtle shades and dark detail

Graffiti jumps out against the bleakness of the near-future Johannesburg backdrop, and the film's trickier colour shadings are handled with nuance. The Samsung doesn't discriminate against black detail, so you're not left in the dark (literally) in gloomier scenes.

It takes the intentionally jerky camera movements in its stride, and even the high-intensity car chases and robot acrobatics cause few problems. We'd imagine this would translate well into 3D but, sadly, the necessary glasses are an extra at £15 per pair from Samsung's website.



Both the basic wand and the smart remote get their design right

Out of curiosity we stick on a relatively dated DVD copy of *Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi* and it's not a decision we lament. There's shine to C3PO, punch to R2D2's lights and as much detail in Chewbacca's coat and Jabba the Hutt's face as you can expect from a TV 'making up' 95 per cent of the picture.

Although objects in the background are understandably soft, picture noise is largely muted. Upholding contrast well, it produces a striking standard-definition picture that won't consign your DVD collection to the bin. SD broadcasts are of a similarly high quality.

The Samsung's speakers can't quite summon the bass weight or dynamics to deal with *Chappie*'s funky sci-fi score, though that's not for want of trying. Generally, it sounds clear and communicative.

Music (and other media) can be played from a smartphone via wi-fi direct or, if you have a compatible device, the TV's screen-mirroring function. But we'd always advise getting a dedicated sound system for music.

## Smart organisation

The smart hub is, of course, one of the TV's main pulls and it offers the full suite of apps (Netflix, Amazon, catch-up TV, you know the drill). These aren't just chucked at you in a daunting list but neatly organised into categories and at the mercy of a search bar.

This intuitive, user-friendly approach - ubiquitous across the platform - is down to Samsung's new open-source OS Tizen, which ditches last year's smart portal for an

## Minimal fuss

We prefer the discreet minimalism of this design (brushed-grey bezel) to the shiny look of Samsung's flagship. The stand, which follows the TV's curve, is cool too, but won't stop a wobble if you knock the screen, so be careful...

overlaying strip of pop-up cards that opens doors to recent and featured content. The whole experience is easy to get along with, as are the basic and smart remotes - both well designed and instinctive to use. Face recognition and motion control features can be unlocked via an optional camera.

The lion's share of connections (four HDMI and two USB inputs, and an optical output) are housed in a separate One Connect Mini box, so you don't have to squeeze between the wall and TV to plug in your Xbox.

With even more sizes, resolutions and technologies now available, choosing the right TV is harder than ever. If you're after big-screen thrills, you consider 4K a must-have and can stretch to £3000, we can't think of a better option than this.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Pin-sharp picture; well judged, nuanced colours; great upscaling ability across the board; user-friendly interface

**AGAINST** Stand could be sturdier

**VERDICT** An exceptional performer across the resolution board, with stacks of features to boot

## Also consider

**Samsung UE55JS8500 £2600 ★★★★★**

This same-ranging model sheds a few inches, but is just as impressive for its asking price





IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

ADVERTISING FEATURE

# THE SOUND OF THE FUTURE

DALI's new Opticon range is pushing the boundaries of speaker technology

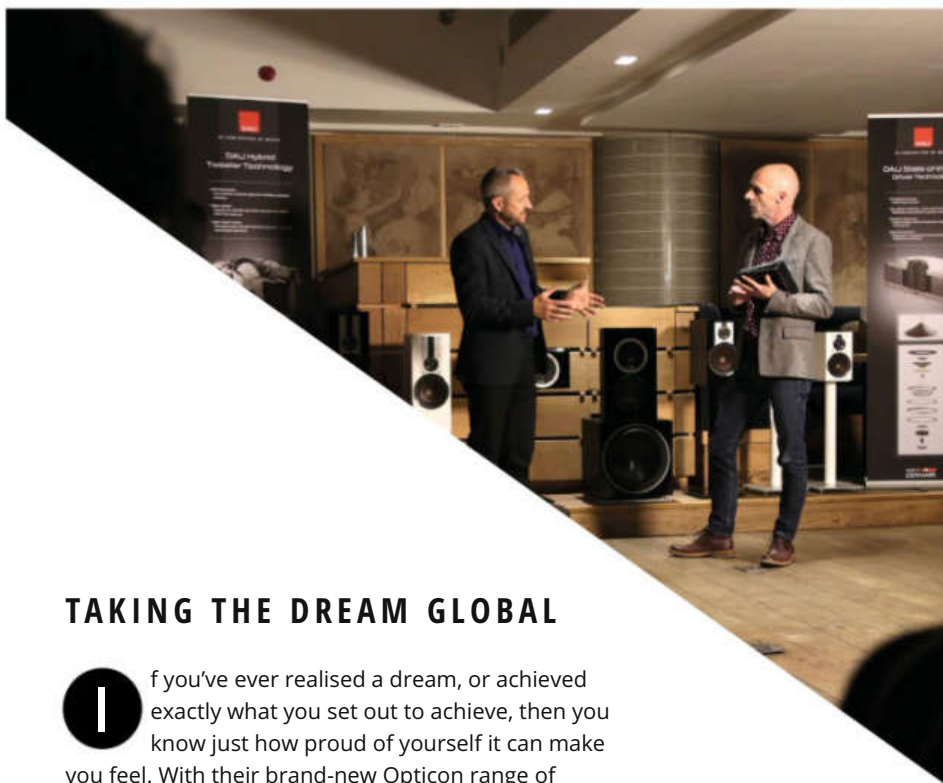
**O**ver more than three decades DALI have won a reputation for manufacturing know-how and audio excellence. And by building on this heritage while remaining firmly focused on the future, DALI have now developed the extraordinary new Opticon range.

The Opticon collection blends sleekly distinctive Danish design with DALI's acknowledged industrial expertise. Drawing on the no-compromise technologies DALI developed for the ultra-high performance (and luxuriously expensive) Epicon and Rubicon series of loudspeakers, the Opticon range delivers high-end performance without the high-end price tag.

Opticon is a seven-strong range – Opticon 1 and 2 are discreet bookshelf stereo designs, Opticon 5, 6 and 8 provide a stereo floorstanding solution for environments of all sizes, while Opticon Vokal and LCR are tuned to fit into an Opticon multi-channel home-cinema system. All seven models are available in Silk Matte White, Black or Walnut finishes, offering visual inspiration that's on a par with the Opticon's class-leading sound.

DALI headed to London to show off their startling new Opticon range...





## TAKING THE DREAM GLOBAL

**I**f you've ever realised a dream, or achieved exactly what you set out to achieve, then you know just how proud of yourself it can make you feel. With their brand-new Opticon range of loudspeakers, DALI have achieved precisely what it set out to achieve – so you can't really blame the company for being rather proud of itself. And having decided to launch its extraordinary Opticon speakers with an evening of free music at Covent Garden's exclusive Hospital Club, blaming DALI for being pleased with itself becomes nigh-on impossible.

Names appeared on the guest list strictly by invitation only (it extended to select journalists, musicians and readers of *Stuff*, *What Hi-Fi?* and *The Clothes Show* magazines) and proved impossible to blag your way onto.

The evening kicked off with DALI Chief Executive Lars Worre explaining a little about DALI, and quite a lot about the new Opticon range, to *What Hi-Fi?* editor Simon Lucas and the invited guests. The interview was filmed and live-streamed around the globe. Additionally, numerous DALI teams in countries as distant as Russia and India were able to watch the bash live at events organised to showcase the Opticon range to their own special guests.







IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

## "Opticon 8 has a beautifully poised, muscular and delicate sound"

Having been put fully in the picture by Lars, DALI's guests were treated to a demonstration of the breathtaking new DALI Opticon 8 floorstanding speakers. The beautifully poised, muscular and delicate sound of the Opticon 8s was given context by a monitor showing the band's performance.

But, like all worthwhile rock'n'roll performances, there was a twist. The already deeply impressed audience was taken to another part of the venue, where it was revealed the music and images they'd been enjoying were taken from a live performance that was happening right there. DALI is all

about bringing listeners as close to the real thing as possible and reproducing its source material with the greatest respect possible – what better way to do that than by allowing top recording artists to do their thing in front of one of the world's top audio companies?

Live performances were from Basix (an award-winning Danish a cappella group), JJ Rosa (sounding like Prince hooking up with Amy Winehouse) and Lukas Graham (the authentically funky, soulful sound of young Copenhagen). And, of course, spectacular redefinition of the art of the loudspeaker came courtesy of DALI.

### THE DALI OPTICON RANGE

DALI's Opticon range gives you plenty of options, from little beauties to big daddies. **Opticon 1** and **2** are compact, bookshelf speakers: **1** comes with almost 5 litres of air for the drivers to do their thing and a rear-mounted bass port that provides a clear midrange and quality bass. **2** has a 6.5-inch woofer and a 28mm soft-dome tweeter to give you powerful, dynamic audio.

**Opticon 5**, **6**, and **8** are DALI's floorstanders. **5** comes packed with a 6.5-inch Wood Fibre woofer. **6** takes everything that's good about **5** and adds an extra 6.5-inch woofer and a larger cabinet for extra power and bass. **8** is the powerhouse, with two 8-inch woofers and a 6.5-inch woofer.

The **LCR** and the **Vokal** both have a 6.5-inch Wood Fibre woofer and both fit in with an Opticon home-cinema system. The **LCR** gives you airy highs, a surprising bass and a detailed midrange for such a slim wall-mounted speaker, while the **Vokal** is designed to fit perfectly with any Opticon speaker whether small or big, and is perfect for anyone who's serious about home cinema. The 5, 6, 8, LCR and VOKAL all include the distinguished DALI Hybrid Tweeter Module.





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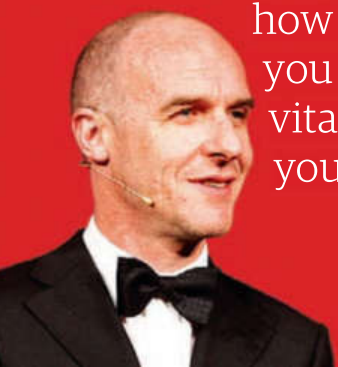


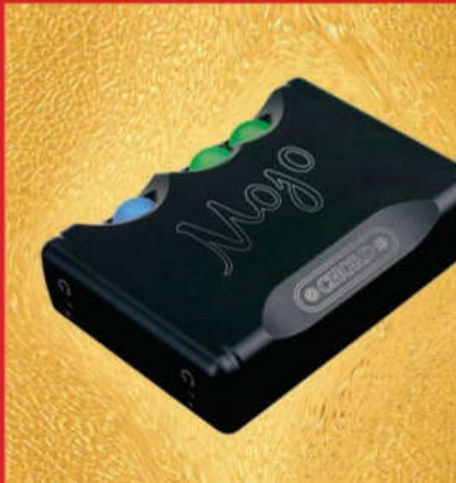
# AWARDS 2015

STREAMERS • TABLETS • SPEAKERS • TVs • TURNTABLES • HEADPHONES

**Honestly, you'd be** surprised how well some of us scrub up. Once a year, team *What Hi-Fi?* invites the electronics and home entertainment industries out for a drink (our treat) and at the same time we explain exactly what we've been doing for the past year. It's always a good night, racy but never crude.

In the course of the evening we announce the products we think represent absolutely the best bang for your home entertainment buck. Over the next 82 pages, we put you in the particular picture too - so if you need to know how best to spend your hard-earned, all the information you need is right here. And you can become party to this vital info at your leisure, even without having to dig out your glad-rags.





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BRINGING MUSIC AND MOVIES TO LIFE

# Soundbars & soundbases

Perhaps you want to improve your TV's sound but don't want the expense or intrusion of a home cinema system. This section is for you

**PRODUCT** OF THE **YEAR**

## Best soundbar under £500

### Q Acoustics Media 4 **£330**

**How do you** hang on to a Product of the Year Award for the second year running? Well, if you're Q Acoustics, you make a product that's so good it beats newer, pricier, and better-featured rivals by a mile. Oh, and you slash the price of your product to make it an even better deal than before.

The Media 4 offers an incredibly likeable and musical sound that's simply a joy to listen to. Whether you're watching *Doctor Who* or the latest *Mission Impossible* adventure, the Media 4's fluid dynamics, expressive midrange and solid sound will keep you hooked on every line of dialogue and action sequence on screen.

Even when Tom Cruise latches on to an aeroplane in flight, the Media 4 keeps its composure: there are no aggressive highs, nor any tubby basslines. A smooth balance throughout keeps things civil. However, there's also ample detail, punch and agility to maintain a good level of authority over soundtracks and music. Voices are clear and subtle.

Crashes, punches and alien sounds have crispness and depth to them, even with a layer of smoothness making everything comfortable to listen to. The Media 4's full-bodied and nimble presentation - similar to that

found in Q Acoustics' stereo speakers - is hugely engaging. It might not deliver the biggest sound, nor is it a substitute for a surround system, but the Media 4's sheer enjoyment wins out at this price.

Its design is unfussy and practical. The sturdy bar is nicely made, with its unique trapezoidal shape allowing for a large, elliptical subwoofer driver to be placed at the back of the cabinet. This aids the soundbar's impressive low-end weight. A couple of 65mm BMR drivers (Balanced Mode Radiators) complete the driver complement.

#### Wired or wireless

There's a decent amount of connectivity: optical, stereo RCA and 3.5mm inputs are available, although some may be disappointed by the lack of HDMI inputs. You get the ability to stream music from a smartphone or tablet using aptX Bluetooth and NFC pairing, though.

This was an impressive soundbar last year, and remains even more so today. Effortlessly enjoyable, and with a price drop that makes it a gem of a bargain - it's a shoo-in for Product of the Year.



## Best soundbar £500+

### Dali Kubik One £800

**Soundbars don't tend** to be particularly attractive, but we dare say that the Dali Kubik One is rather pretty. It looks luxurious, with a cloth finish (in various colours) that gives it a high-end lifestyle vibe. Even considering this soundbar (or 'sound system', according to Dali) costs £800, the Kubik One feels and looks as if it's worth every penny.

But Dali hasn't spent all its attention (or budget) on dyed wool. Under that cloth grille you'll find two 25mm soft-dome tweeters and two 13cm wood-fibre cones. The Danish manufacturer has a rich heritage in loudspeaker design, so it's no surprise the Kubik One sounds rather good. Really rather good.

#### Big sound, big soundstage

It's hard not to notice the size of the sound. The Kubik One is a big bar, and the soundstage produced is likewise wide and spacious, allowing a movie's sound effects comfortably to ping around the room with precision and punch. Voices are delivered with remarkable clarity and subtlety. There's ample low-end heft to the roar of engines and explosions in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, while *Inception's* moody soundtrack is handled with impressive control and dynamics - you can hear the layers

of textures in that sustained bass note.

It's a stunning performance. Whether you're watching a film or listening to music, the Kubik One's greatest strength is its ability to seize your attention. It's a thoroughly involving experience: we don't tend to expect this from soundbars.

The Dali is kitted out with two optical and a single pair of analogue inputs, aptX Bluetooth streaming and a subwoofer output. But our favourite is the addition of a micro USB port for your PC or Mac

*There's ample low-end heft to the roar of engines and explosions in Guardians Of The Galaxy, while Inception's moody soundtrack is handled with impressive control*



laptop. Three cheers if you've got a library of high-res tracks stored on there - the soundbar can handle tracks up to 24-bit/96kHz.

Elsewhere, the new remote control is a sturdier and more satisfying design that the old flimsy, credit-card one, while the buttons on the unit itself are responsive and nice to use.

#### Right first time

The Kubik One is more than just an extension of your TV: it's a system in its own right, and one that delivers the kind of sound quality that's worth dipping into your savings for. With its first soundbar, Dali has struck gold.

## Best soundbase under £400

### Canton DM55 £330



**When Canton released** the £400 DM50 last year, we loved its sturdy, elegant build and rich, detailed sound. Its successor, the DM55, retains much of what we loved before, but adds an elegant glass top, some sonic tweaks and a price cut. Canton has cleverly not made any drastic changes (after all, why mess with something that was great to begin with?), and as a result the new DM55 remains an excellent proposition for boosting the sound quality of your TV.

#### Sound and Fury signifying a lot

It's a chunky, solid sound, packed with subtle textures and soaring dynamics. As *Mad Max: Fury Road's* spectacular soundtrack roars into existence, the DM55 confidently handles the frantic, charging rhythm. This soundbase has a rich and meaty character, which is perfect for

belting out the incessant roar of engines, and the thundering drums and guitar strums. Special effects are spaced out nicely, with the right amount of punch and excitement keeping you drawn into the film's crazy action sequences. Bass hits deep - very deep for a soundbase of this size (it's 7cm high, 55cm wide and 30cm deep) - but remains tight and stops short of being overpowering.

*As Mad Max: Fury Road's soundtrack roars into existence, the DM55 confidently handles the frantic, charging rhythm. It has a rich and meaty character*

It's not all brawn, though. The DM55 manages to be subtle and agile, showing control and restraint even when pushed to a higher volume. The full-bodied balance means there's no undue harshness, and that warm, fluid sound goes well with music too.

You can switch from the Stereo mode to Surround - it opens up the soundfield to give you a more cinematic feel, but without compromising the cohesion of the midrange.

#### A finish with a flourish

We really like the DM55's glass-topped design. It adds a premium flourish to what is already a well-built unit.

Despite soundbars racing ahead by including as many features as possible, soundbases haven't felt that same urgency. Therefore, there's still no HDMI input on the Canton. You'll have to connect to your TV using the optical or coaxial inputs (which are more than sufficient in most cases), but the DM55 also offers analogue outputs and aptX Bluetooth streaming.

Combining excellent sound quality with a classy design, solid build and good features, this soundbase is an affordable product that will elevate your TV's sound to make it a more enjoyable, engaging experience.

## Best soundbase £400+

### Geneva Model Cinema £550

**We're more used** to seeing Geneva take the prize in the wireless speaker category (which it does yet again this year, twice), but the Swiss company has used its musical know-how to tap into another burgeoning market: the soundbase.

The Model Cinema is the priciest soundbase we've tested so far – soundbars tend to venture more into the premium market – but in this instance it seems that Geneva has spared little expense in ensuring the Cinema feels like a high-quality product.

#### Solid and sophisticated

Build and finish quality are both a significant notch above the Cinema's cheaper rivals, with Geneva adding a smooth, metallic finish, matching front grille and responsive touch-sensitive buttons to the unit. The remote is similarly elegant, its buttons having a reassuring click to them. Even the clear display automatically dims or brightens up according to the level of your room's lighting. Sometimes it's the little things that count.

Once again there's no HDMI port in sight, but the Cinema's connectivity, while basic, is essentially practical. There are optical, coaxial, stereo RCA and 3.5mm inputs, and Bluetooth streaming is also available.



This is already a lovely unit that would look at home under your TV, but its sonic performance is the true star here. Fire up any Marvel Blu-ray (sonic excitement guaranteed), and you'll be met with a big, wide sound with a level of authority that is astounding. Dynamically, the Model Cinema puts much of the competition to shame. It's no one-trick pony either – in one breath it's powerful and full-bodied, and in the next subtle and considered.

*Dynamically, the **Model Cinema** puts much of the competition to shame. In one breath, it's powerful and full-bodied, and in the next, subtle and considered*

Explosions and punches are dealt out with poise and control, while also being muscular, attacking and offering lashings of low-end rumble. Dialogue is remarkably clear, with voices packed with nuance and depth. Even when the volume is cranked up, the Geneva doesn't falter, nor does it display any thinness or loss of composure.

#### You get what you pay for

Yes, it's a pricey soundbase, but its talents are obvious from the second you press play. We're astonished by the level of refinement and authority expressed by this elegant unit: it transforms your TV's sound into something a little more special and cinematic. An easy win.

## Soundbars vs Soundbases

**As TVs have** become slimmer, their sound has become thinner. It's adequate, but if you want more detail, scale and dynamics, then your telly won't cut it. A 5.1 surround system would do the job, but they can take up space, aren't great for small rooms, and even in larger spaces they add to the clutter.

That's where soundbars and soundbases come in. Soundbars are a popular choice for beefing up weak TV sound, but they are now being challenged by the soundbase. While it performs the same function, its attributes make it a viable alternative.

#### Positioning/placement

Soundbases offer a big, solid 'base' deep enough to place your TV on. They can be a neater solution than the sometimes awkwardly shaped soundbar.

The soundbases we've tested state they can support a TV up to 40kg so, with modern TVs being relatively light, weight shouldn't be an issue. It's the size of the stand that matters, so make sure the soundbase can ably support it.

Don't expect all soundbases to be similar in size though. Canton's DM 75 and Sony's HT-XT1 were made for larger TVs, putting them at a width similar to that of a soundbar. You'll need a sizeable equipment rack to sit a soundbase on, especially when, of course, the depth of a soundbase is much greater than that of a soundbar.

Soundbars offer a different proposition. Most are sleek, some are bulky (notably Focal's Dimension bar) and tend to be around a metre long, and in most cases you'll need a rack that's wide enough to support it. If not, then there's the option of wall-mounting it.

A soundbar that's too tall may block the IR blaster on your TV; too small and it might sound a little on the weedy side. Philips' 2014 Award-winning HTL5140 has speakers you can detach if space is a problem. Some soundbars have a built-in bass unit, making them chunkier, while others have the option of an external woofer that's either wired or wireless. Where the subwoofer goes is dependent on space.

#### Inputs and outputs

Many of the soundbars and soundbases we've tested haven't been stacked with inputs or outputs, though. Around the budget and mid-price area, you can find a soundbar with at least one HDMI input and digital

*There's little to choose between a soundbase and soundbar – it's down to what's more convenient for your set-up. Which is better? The one that fulfils your needs best*

Soundbars and soundbases aren't stacked with inputs or outputs. You may have to spend more to get HDMI

coaxial or optical audio connection.

Streaming via Bluetooth (or any wireless connectivity) shouldn't be taken for granted but, along with NFC pairing, it has been creeping in to a number of lower-priced models. Expect the same options from a soundbase. Considering an HDMI port offers the best sound from high-resolution Blu-rays, the lack of one may be a sticking point.

#### So how do they sound?

Both options can offer excellent sound, but a soundbase also holds bigger drive units, so performance is more spacious and punchy. A 'base' with side speakers could, in theory, generate a wide soundfield but that's not always the case.

Soundbars have their virtues, too. Yamaha's YSP models can create a soundfield that's very close to a 5.1 surround set-up, while a dedicated subwoofer has a left to it that an integrated unit may not have.

In reality there's little to choose between them – it's down to what's more convenient for your set-up. Which is better? The one that fulfils your needs best.





# Radios

Radios are old-fashioned devices with no hint of wi-fi or Spotify, right? Think again. These transistors are packed with the latest features



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best radio £100–£200

### Roberts Stream 93i £150

**The Roberts Stream 93i** is a fine radio, with an appealing performance and an equally appealing price tag. It has retained its Product of the Year gong because of just how good and versatile it is for the money.

It's not as pretty as the wood-and-metal pieces by Pure and Revo on the opposite page, but we can't fault the sturdy build, the responsive buttons and dials or that large display. Once you factor in the fantastic sound, you know that this is not a radio to be judged by superficial means.

#### Harmonious blend

The Stream 93i delivers stunningly crisp and clear dialogue, with nuance in spades. Voices are confident and expressive. The treble is just bright enough, and the bass is surprisingly weighty for a small box. It rumbles and punches deep, with precise low notes that are taut and zippy.

There's always the danger that a powerful bass will overwhelm other frequencies, but here everything blends together harmoniously. Music – whether played via DAB or wi-fi – is delivered with dynamic subtlety, and the Stream 93i's overall well-rounded performance proves unfussy

with all music types. Sound quality is consistent across sources, although radio does sound a notch better than Spotify-streamed tunes.

#### Packed with features

The amount of features found on this £150 radio puts rivals to shame. Not just a simple radio, it's a mini-streamer/system in its own right. With UPnP functionality, it can play pretty much anything. The DAB/FM/internet radio reception is exemplary, and internet connectivity (wired or wi-fi) lets you pick up songs from a NAS drive or Spotify Connect. It won't play high-res audio, but the 93i can handle MP3, WMA, AAC, FLAC, and WAV. The only missing piece from this Roberts' repertoire is Bluetooth, but add a great little remote control and you've got yourself a tidy system packed with features for a tantalisingly affordable price.

Even with newer rivals threatening its place, the Stream 93i is yet to be beaten in this category. But that features list and price tag are difficult to argue with, and so this Roberts radio, with its solid, weighty sound and superb way with voices, is the undisputed champion for yet another year.

## Best radio under £100

### Pure Evoke D2 £80

**Are you surprised** to see the Pure Evoke D2 back on this page? We aren't. It's a hat-trick of Award wins for this beautiful little machine – an impressive accomplishment for a modest radio costing just £80. But there's no secret to the reason why the Evoke D2 keeps on winning the sub-£100 prize – it's beautifully made, it manages to be affordable, and it sounds so charming and detailed.

#### Hog the limelight

The Evoke D2 is incredible with voices – a crucial point for radios. Dialogue is delivered with nuance and refinement, and a smooth, rich balance gives particular attention to the midrange. But even those qualities don't hog the limelight: the Evoke D2 has a natural balance that allows the rest of the frequencies to flourish as well.

*The **Evoke D2** is incredible with voices – a crucial point for radios. Dialogue is delivered with nuance, and a rich balance gives particular attention to the midrange*

Highs are crisp but never sharp, while the bass is speedy and taut. You shouldn't expect a lot of low-end muscle and oomph from something this size, but there's a kick to it that keeps a rhythm bouncing along. No, it won't go big and loud enough to fill a busy, large room, but then again we're not expecting it to. Just look at it. It's perfect for normal listening in your bedroom or kitchen.

As a radio specialist, Pure knows exactly what people want from a petite radio. This table-top size is ideal for any space, and you can even make it fully portable by attaching a ChargePak – a £25 rechargeable battery pack.

The wood-veneer finish, neat fascia, and easy to use buttons and dials make it a dream to use. The display feels a bit dated (especially now in its third year), but the rest of the unit is so lovely that we can forgive this minor quibble.

#### Effective tuner

The Evoke D2 gives you plenty of radio stations. There are 20 presets available – 10 each for FM and DAB. The tuners are effective, finding stations swiftly and sticking to them with a cast-iron grip. As well as the tuners, the Evoke D2 has a 3.5mm auxiliary input for external sources, as well as alarms and sleep timer.

With its ease of use, neat finish and excellent sound quality for the money, it's little wonder that this Pure radio has remained one of our favourites again this year.



## Best radio £200+

### Revo SuperConnect £280

**The Revo SuperConnect** shows that radios are no longer old-fashioned listening devices. This super-radio is a masterclass in combining the humble radio with top streaming features and placing it into a stylish box. All for just £280.

This radio doesn't just have FM and DAB tuners, it also has internet radio. Wired ethernet and built-in wi-fi gives you access to hundreds of radio stations, while DLNA certification lets

you stream any music files saved on your NAS, Mac or PC. It also has aptX Bluetooth for playing smartphone-stored music, and features Spotify Connect – one of the very first radios to do so.

#### Modern and retro

Aesthetically, the SuperConnect is an elegant mix of modern and retro. The sleek aluminium fascia and 2.7in OLED display contrast smartly with the walnut veneer. Revo makes good use of the large screen space, packing in plenty of track information that's crisp and easy to read. You can control the radio using the decent-sized remote, or by using the unit's small joystick. It's a bit unusual at first, but intuitive once you get the hang of it.

#### Weighty sound

Did we mention it sounds great, too? It must do, as it's the second time the SuperConnect has won an Award for its talents.

It may not look like it, but the Revo can deliver an impressively weighty sound. The 15W of amplification is put to full use, delivering scale and authority you don't hear from rival radios. There's no trace of brightness or harshness, and the SuperConnect delivers good quality sound no matter the source.

Bass is meaty, but can be a tad rich – if you find it too full for your taste, you can turn it down with the tone settings. The Revo's remarkable clarity and detail definition come to the fore with dialogue-heavy material, which is good news if you listen to a lot of podcasts, comedy shows or sports commentaries.

There isn't a single rival that can compete with the SuperConnect's breadth of features and performance at this money. It's brilliantly put together, and deserves pride of place on your mantelpiece.

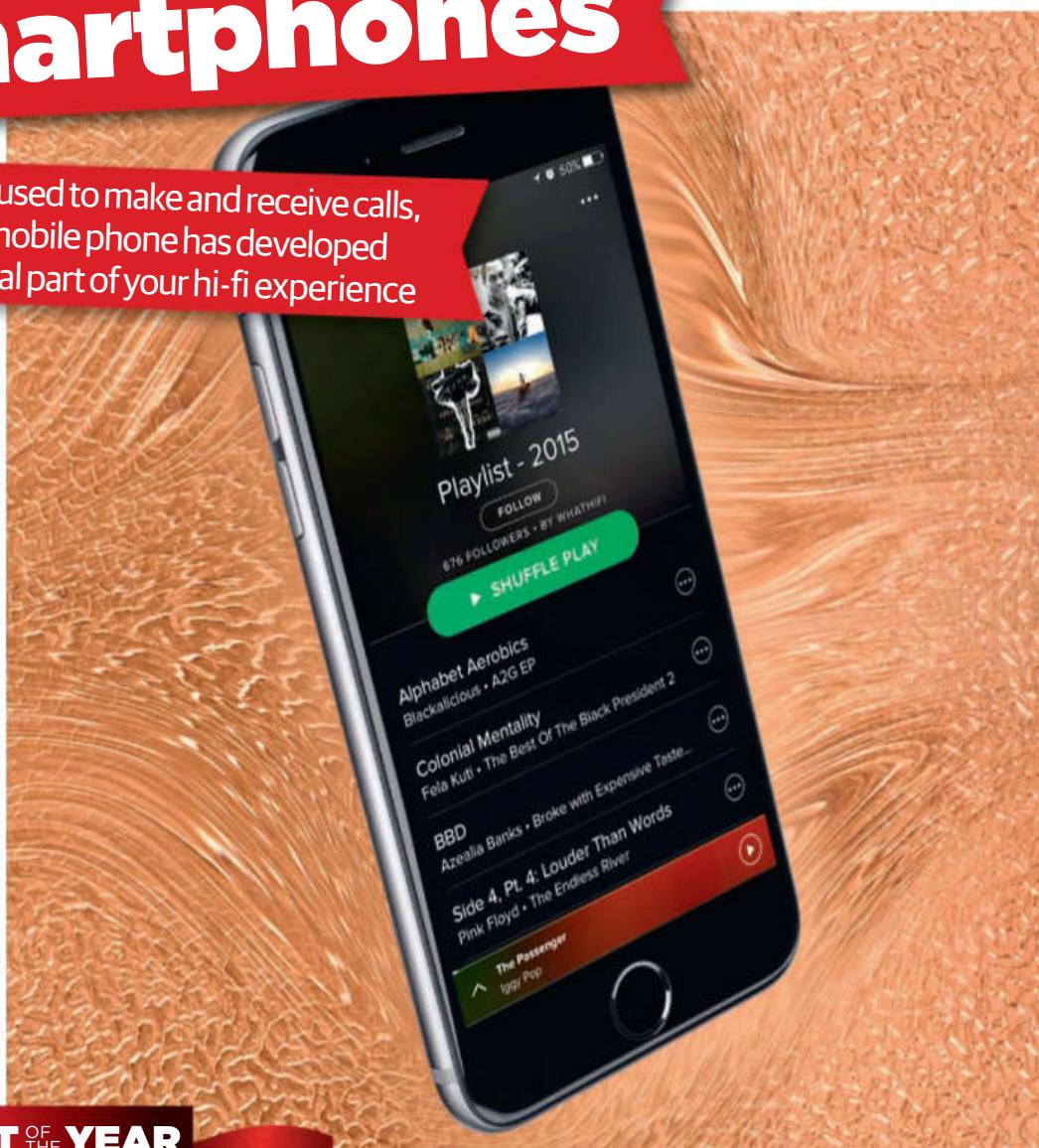
*The **Revo's** remarkable clarity and definition come to the fore with dialogue-heavy material, which is good news if you listen to a lot of podcasts, comedy or sport*





# Smartphones

Once simply used to make and receive calls, the humble mobile phone has developed into an integral part of your hi-fi experience



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best smartphone under 5.5in

**Apple iPhone 6S £550**

**We don't know** how Apple does it. There have been several astonishingly good smartphones this year, some of which were worthy winners in this category. Then Apple pops up, and here we are. It's turning into a habit.

Why? Because it has managed to out-perform the competition on picture and sound performance. How? By putting in the effort where it really counts. You may find 2540x1440 (Quad HD) screens on some rivals, but Apple gets by just fine on 1334x750 (not-even HD). The decision to stick with a 4.7in screen ensures those pixels are not too thinly spread – a tactic that counters the larger screens with higher resolutions.

One glance at the iPhone 6S shows there is as much clarity as you'll need. It's an insightful picture, and you can easily pick out individual foliage if you wish. Are rivals sharper? Only if you carry a microscope.

### Making a nice thing even nicer

More important than the number of pixels is what the device does with them. Other colour palettes may present a stronger kick to the eyeballs, but iPhone 6S offers the most natural and least distracting.

Then there's the sound. Traditionally a strong area, this year it's better than ever. Okay, so it isn't compatible with hi-res audio, but when the CD-quality performance is this good, you won't think of those extra bits.

Apple's sound is recognisable: tight timing, plenty of energy, and the confidence to handle wide dynamic shifts with panache. This makes a return, but with one significant improvement: tonal balance.

You get detail at the top without the sound ever hardening up. You get low-end heft without it drowning everything else out. Then there's the midrange, clear and direct without hogging your attention.

Of course, we have to mention the iPhone 6S's headline feature: 3D Touch. This is the pressure-sensitive screen and software, which adds an extra dimension to device interaction. How hard you press the screen will determine how the phone reacts. Want to open a file or just have a peek? The choice is yours. It's a small but welcome addition, and a clear demonstration that Apple has the ability to make a nice thing even nicer.

Top picture, top sound, and a clever way to operate what is already a very shiny device: it's hard to get any better than this.

## Best smartphone over 5.5in

### Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge+ £540

**Samsung has got** its act together. For years, the company's smartphones fell short of the competition, but now it has shot to the top.

This is one of the most beautiful portable devices we've seen all year. Gone are the plastic and fake leather that dominated the brand, replaced by expensive glass and shiny metal instead. It now oozes class.

#### Easy to hold

Samsung has also gone for an unusual, rather fetching aesthetic. It's a curved screen, but not like any other we've seen before. The screen is flat, but the edges drop away left and right.

Why? Partly because it looks very cool indeed. Partly because it makes the device easy to hold, a significant factor when you remember the 5.7in screen, which plants this phone firmly in the 'tablet-sized' camp.

*Gone are the plastic and fake leather that dominated the brand, replaced by expensive glass and shiny metal. The **S6 Edge+** now oozes class*

But the dropped edges have a use too. The customisable 'active' edge lets you add shortcuts for contacts or apps, which saves you trawling through the home screen and app drawer. Is it important? No, but it's lovely.

#### Well-judged colours

What is crucial is the performance, and this Samsung S6 Edge+ is a great multimedia player. The Quad HD (2560 x 1440) screen is bright and sharp as you like.

It's a gorgeous picture with rich, well judged colours, not exaggerated like Samsung has previously and regularly been accused of. Skin tones look natural and convincing. Skies are the correct shade of blue and clouds aren't unnecessarily tinged.

Contrast is a particular strength, thanks to that Super AMOLED panel. The blacks are deeper than any smartphone we've seen this year, while whites are strong enough to punch right through and shine brilliantly.

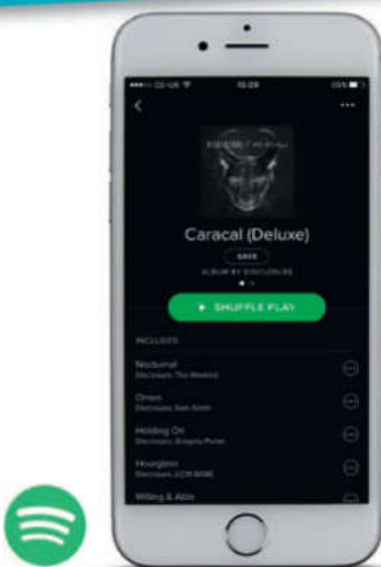
The S6 Edge+ sounds good too. It's pleasingly clear and precise sound with no shortage of detail. Play the Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Can't Stop* and it's easy to make out the percussive scratching during the more chaotic moments, which is easily missed elsewhere.



The Samsung has the dynamic knowhow to distinguish between soft and loud. There's plenty of power when excitement is needed, and nuance when refinement is appropriate.

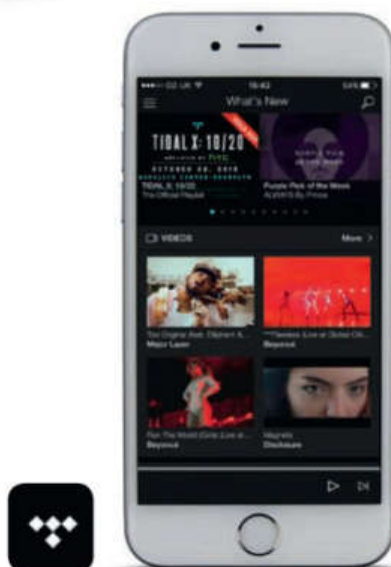
It can handle high-resolution music up to 24bit/192kHz, playing pretty much anything you throw at it, and the massive 3400mAh battery will give you plenty of juice to do it.

## Choose a streaming service



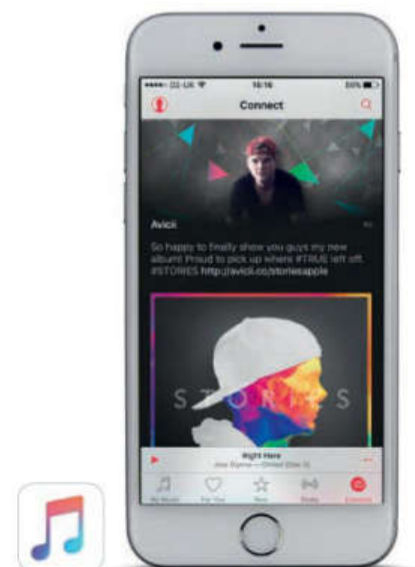
#### Spotify

Spotify has one of the largest music libraries and has an intuitive interface. The free, ad-supported version will suit many, but the Premium subscription provides a bump up in music quality and offline listening. It's available on virtually every platform too. The main drawback? There isn't the option of streaming CD-quality tracks.



#### Tidal

Tidal's catalogue of 25 million tracks is available in CD-quality format for a £20/month. Sound quality is a plus point, delivering a more engaging performance than Spotify. The service also offers HD music videos and curated content from its celebrity backers. The mobile app is available on high-res streaming systems including Bluesound.



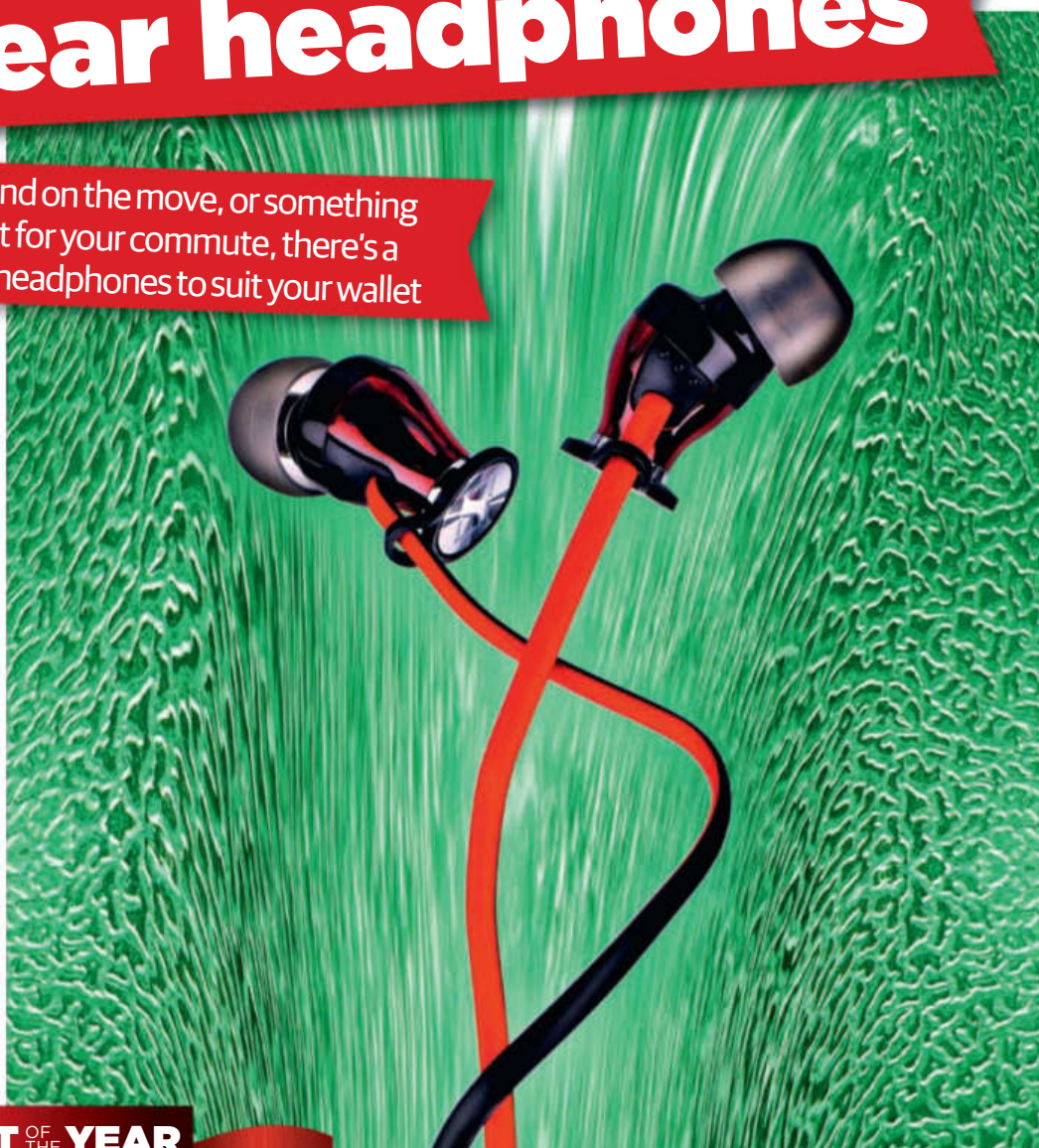
#### Apple Music

It may be late to the streaming party but that doesn't mean Apple Music should be overlooked. Curated content and playlists are a great way to discover new music, as is Beats 1 Radio. There's offline listening and a large catalogue of music to choose from, and while Apple hasn't disclosed what bit-rate songs are streamed in, they sound more detailed than Spotify's.



# In-ear headphones

For great sound on the move, or something more discreet for your commute, there's a pair of in-ear headphones to suit your wallet



**PRODUCT** OF THE **YEAR**

## Best in-ears £50-£100

### Sennheiser Momentum M2 in-ear **£90**

**When Sennheiser announced** it was introducing an in-ear model to its Momentum range of stylish headphones, we hoped they could match the quality of its over-ear models. Needless to say, they didn't disappoint.

#### **In-ears that keep it in the family**

They deliver a wonderfully smooth and balanced sound, in keeping with the character of the Momentum family. There's plenty of drive and a great sense of musicality.

Lows are rich and weighty, but they hit your ears with purpose and intent. Leading edges are expertly defined and the rhythm of a track is

aided by the Sennheiser's nimbleness and ability to keep to a fast tempo. The highs are crisp and precise without pushing too hard – they pulse out of the top of the soundstage with impressive dynamism.

There's a fine sense of clarity to the sound too. Instruments and vocals pour out detail thanks to an immense sense of spaciousness. Finer nuances are easy to pick out and each level of the sound is given plenty of space in which to shine.

Sennheiser's Momentum range has made a real impact and, while the over-ear models have stolen a lot of the limelight, the level of performance that the in-ear model delivers for the money is outstanding.

#### **A sound that matches many more-expensive rivals**

Such is their ability that numerous rivals have fallen short, and even models costing twice the price have struggled to keep up with super-talented Sennheisers. Whether you want to upgrade from an entry-level pair or just want to jump straight in at this price, the Momentum in-ears deliver on all fronts.

*The **Sennheiser Momentum M2 in-ears** deliver a wonderfully smooth and balanced sound, in keeping with the character of the family*

## Best in-ears under £50

### SoundMagic E10S **£40**

In the grand scheme of upgrades, £40 for a pair of in-ear headphones is up there as one of the simplest, most affordable and most satisfying.

And SoundMagic has been leading the way in this field for the past few years - 2015 marks the fifth year in a row that the company has walked away with a Best Buy Award.

#### Low price, no catch

The E10Ss have had a habit of receiving little tweaks over their lifetime, and this year is no different. The changes for 2015, though, are purely cosmetic and ergonomic - the well-made metal buds (and their internals) remain the same. As well as looking smart, they feel a good deal more luxurious than the price suggests.

The smartphone compatibility switch has been moved to the cable's Y-section, meaning the 3.5mm plug, now at a 60-degree angle and made of metal instead of plastic, is slimmer and sturdier than before. And yet their price has stayed the same. What's the catch?

From what we can see (and, more importantly, hear), there isn't one. These are still light, compact and comfortable in-ear headphones. They come supplied with a selection of tips, so owners of even the most unconventional ear should find a good fit.

Once they're sealed in, you get the same robust, punchy and hugely enthusiastic sound that makes the E10Ss so likeable. Instruments sing with just the right amount of bite and

reach, while vocals are clear and expressive, and there's a satisfying weight to the whole sound.

It's not hard to start having fun with the E10Ss. At this, you'd be crazy not to invest.



## Best in-ears £100-£300

### Shure SE425 **£200**

When we think of the Shure 425s, a few adjectives come to mind, including 'Award-winning'. 2015 is the third year on the trot the Shure SE425s have walked away with a *What Hi-Fi?* Award. So what's their recipe for success?

#### Sense of isolation

It's all in the detail. Play a few tunes and it's as if the SE425s disappear, leaving you with a pure sound. To call them immersive would be an understatement - the level of finesse on offer here is astonishing.

There's an abundance of energy - put on some classic rock and the SE425s prove they're more than capable of handling punchy drum thwacks and tight rhythms. The midrange is as

solid as you like. That vein of detail continues right down the frequency range. Vocals are placed to the fore, yet they never clash with other elements. There's plenty of nuance too.

It's helped by the sense of isolation, which aids low-frequency extension. The SE425s really do block out almost everything around you. The enclosures are detachable, so worn-out cables can be replaced for less than the price of a new set of earphones. The enclosures also swivel on the ends of the cables, making them easier to fit.

If you can get over the Shure SE425s' less-than-conventional styling, you'll never look back. These are the finest in-ears at this price we've heard in ages and they continue to beat new rivals time after time. What more could you ask for from an Award-winner?



## Best in-ears £300+

### Sennheiser IE 800 **£600**

Expensive in-ear headphones have a tough time convincing people of their worth. When the likes of the SoundMagic E10S and Sennheiser Momentum in-ears exist, how could you justify a pair costing many times as much?

#### One listen and we're smitten

The IE 800s are wallet-witheringly expensive, but they also sound astonishingly good. Once you've had a listen to these buds, the scope of their abilities becomes immediately apparent.

No matter what music genre you throw at them, the Sennheisers remain unfazed. Their authority and control are unquestionable. Low-frequency stuff is delivered with speed, definition, and superb tonal variation.

Midrange communication and articulation is among the best we've heard from in-ears. Then there's that crisp attack at the top, along with a fanatical level of attention to the beginning and decay of notes.

Such is the Sennheiser's eloquence the interplay between musical elements is obvious. For sheer musicality, the IE800s make a pretty watertight case for themselves.

If you're spending this much, you'll want some fancy tech to justify it - and the IE 800s don't disappoint. The extra-wideband transducers promise distortion-free sound even at high volume. Harmonic distortion levels are so low as to be apparently non-existent.

You'd be hard-pressed to find a more accomplished set of headphones at this price.





# Portable music players

The dedicated portable music player may seem a bit of a difficult sell, but that's only until you hear one as good as this...



**PRODUCT** OF THE **YEAR**

## Best portable music player

**Astell & Kern AK Jr £400**

Let's get the peevish over with first. They're hardly numerous, after all, so here they are. For a portable music player costing £400, the AK Jr doesn't have a particularly bright, particularly high-resolution touchscreen. And while it's an aluminium-hewn slice of high-quality engineering, the Astell & Kern's frame is needlessly pointy and sharp. And, um, that's about it. In every other respect (and in one fundamental respect in particular), the AK Jr is everything we want in a music player.

Slim enough (8.9mm down to 6.9mm thanks to the tapering design) and light enough (93g) to be truly portable even if it's just being stowed in a shirt pocket, the AK Jr is a tactile object. Ergonomically it's sound – the 3.1in touchscreen is nobody's idea of the cutting edge, but it's home to a logical and responsive interface. Its specification is on the money too: its Wolfson DAC can handle high-resolution audio files (a wide range of files, what's more, including DSD) up to 24-bit/192kHz, and the 64GB of internal memory can be boosted by up to twice that by slipping in a microSD card. Bluetooth 4.0 is on the menu as well, so streaming to a suitable system or to wireless headphones is possible.

That's all well and good, but why should you choose the AK Jr when our Award-winning Samsung smartphone (p42) has the same high-res audio ability and a screen you could never describe as 'dim' or 'low-resolution'? The answer's pretty simple: the AK Jr leaves the Samsung more-or-less for dead when talk turns to sound quality.

### Richly communicative

Playing a 176.4kHz file of Michael Jackson's *Billie Jean*, the Astell & Kern is a crisp, substantial and wide-open listen. Dynamics (both high- and low-level) are strong, cohesion and integration entirely convincing. The songs is timed immaculately by the AK Jr, the deathless bass-line prompt and unhurried, while the midrange is detail-heavy and richly communicative. The overall presentation is brisk, poised and as forceful as it needs to be.

If you're a high-res advocate, you will find the AK Jr just the ticket. And if you're still to be convinced, stick a decent pair of headphones into this player and prepare to be converted.



MAKING WAVES IN THE ART OF SOUND

## Muo WIRELESS SPEAKER

Design by Ross Lovegrove. Sound by KEF.

Innovation disrupts. When KEF collaborated with design guru Ross Lovegrove to create the mighty Muon, it rocked the world of extreme high end audio. Inspired by the mighty Muon's sculptural organic form and breakthrough technologies, the Muo makes new waves in the pursuit of art and sound perfection.



"Our Verdict: Great portable sound with a touch of luxury."  
KEF Muo, What Hi-Fi?, September 2015

KEF.COM

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**KEF**

OBSESSED WITH HIGH RESOLUTION



# Home cinema amplifiers

Want to add some extra power and precision to your movies and music? A home cinema amp will bring the best out of your equipment



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best AV receiver £300–£600

**Denon AVR-X2200W £500**

Any AV manufacturer worth its salt knows how important the £500 AV receiver market is. After a few years of falling short, Denon has pulled out all the stops with the AVR-X2200W. This receiver pushes the boundaries of what we expect at this level, with support for both Dolby Atmos and DTS:X, generous connectivity and all the futureproofing you could want.

### Refined presentation

It's as big on performance as it is on the spec sheet, delivering a dynamic, insightful sound. Unlike many of its rivals, all eight of the X2200W's HDMI inputs support HDR content and 4K upscaling up to 60fps, plus they're all HDCP 2.2 compliant and offer 4:4:4 full colour resolution for 4K content.

The seven speaker terminals can be wired up as a standard seven-channel setup, or by using the surround backs to power a pair of Dolby Atmos speakers instead. You'll need to select your desired speaker configuration in the menu before you run the thorough Audyssey set-up.

We start with a seven-channel set-up, and load *Fast and Furious 7*. The Denon handles the high-octane soundtrack superbly, injecting a sense of

excitement and eagerness. There's detail in every tyre screech, and a dynamic fluidity that enables it to deal with the loud and explosive as well as the quiet and considered.

It's not as muscular as some, but Denon puts the emphasis on a refined presentation. Up top, the treble is crisp and the midrange is expressive, while the low-end packs enough rumble for the big action scenes.

### Subtle detail

Switch to an Atmos set-up, and the Denon delivers a similar presentation but with a noticeably greater sense of height than in the traditional set-up.

As for music, the Denon offers superb performance, revealing the same engaging character it has with movies, with a strong handling of rhythm and timing, and plenty of subtle detail.

For £500, the Denon X2200W gives you an exciting home cinema experience whatever set-up you choose, while also futureproofing your system for some time to come. If that's not Product of the Year material, we don't know what is.

## Best home cinema amplifier under £350

### Yamaha RX-V379 £300

**Everyone has to** start somewhere, and if you're new to the world of home cinema you might want to dip your toes into the budget market rather than jumping in at the deep end. And Yamaha does this part better than anyone else.

It's been quite a few years since any other company has taken the Award at this price, and with Yamaha's combination of features and performance it's not hard to see why.

While we expect to see a slightly lighter spec-list at this price, Yamaha does a fine job of making sure we don't feel too left out. For the first time at this level, Bluetooth is built in and Yamaha has paid particular attention to ensuring the circuitry performs as well as ever with the wireless tech on board.

There's no 4K upscaling, but you get 4K pass-through at 60fps with HDCP 2.2 on board for supporting Netflix 4K and future 4K Blu-rays.

#### Subtlety in spades

The RX-V379 is a 5.1 channel amplifier with four HDMI inputs and one output, enough for handling most entry-level systems. You'll also get one optical and two coaxial inputs, plus a handful of legacy connections for older kit.

Despite its entry-level standing, the V379 retains the powerful character of the rest of the



series, claiming 100W per channel. Explosions are hard-hitting and delivered with impact, while effects move around the room to create an immersive environment that a soundbar just can't match.

There's plenty of space to its presentation too, so dynamics have a chance to shine. And the detail on offer is superb for its price, with expression and subtlety in spades.

This character is mirrored with its musical performance, which is delivered with punch and insight. Bluetooth suffers from a slight drop in scale and dynamics, but otherwise offers a strong wireless option for those who want it.

Yamaha has put its past experience to superb use in the RX-V379, making it the best way to enter the home cinema market on a budget.

*The **RX-V379** retains the powerful character of the rest of the series. Explosions are hard-hitting, while effects move around the room to create an immersive environment*

## Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1000

### Yamaha RX-A850 £900

**We've long admired** Yamaha's Aventure range. Offering a real jump up in components and spec from its regular V Series, it's a real option for AV enthusiasts looking for the very best.

It's a five strong line-up, with the 7.2ch RX-A850 sitting at the sweet spot of price, features and performance, serving as the entry-level Atmos option for Yamaha this year.

You won't be at a loss for connections, with eight HDMI inputs (three of them HDCP 2.2 compatible) and a full range of legacy connections for older kit. As for wireless connectivity, take your pick from Bluetooth,

Airplay, DLNA and Spotify Connect, plus Yamaha's MusicCast multi-room system.

#### Handled with care

Aventure amps have thrilled us with their powerful and immersive surround sound in the past, and the RX-A850 continues that tradition. If you want it big and loud, this will do nicely.

But that's not to say it's all about muscle. Take a Blu-ray of *Edge of Tomorrow* and skip to the beach-invasion scene. While explosions are full of weight, there's expression and depth here that deliver more than just low-end grunt.

Gunfire is placed precisely around the room, giving a convincing account of the battle, while also delivering a highly entertaining experience.

It's also capable of great subtlety, with atmospheric sounds - the quiet hums of air conditioning and the turning of pages in a book - all handled with care. Dynamically, you'll find it a masterclass in delivering the peaks and troughs of a soundtrack.

Dolby Atmos is a welcome addition. Keeping the same character of a 7.2ch setup, the added height successfully recreates the sensation of having more space, while the 360-degree effects placement is eerily precise.

The Yamaha RX-A850 represents a jump in performance from the £500 mark - perfect for those wanting to invest a touch more in their home cinema setup. If your budget lies around the £1000 mark, spend it here.



*Yamaha's Aventure amps have thrilled us with their surround sound, and the **RX-A850** continues this tradition. If you want it loud, this will do nicely*



# LG MUSICflow

SMART HI FI AUDIO  
Wireless Multi-Room

LIVE IN  
FLOWING  
SOUND

LG's MUSICflow H4 Smart Hi-Fi Audio Speaker allows you to play music all over the home. A multi-room speaker, you can select songs easily thanks to the intuitive LG MUSICflow Player app\*. Whilst with up to 8 hours of battery life\*\* you can now take your favourite music to your best moments - hands-free, wirelessly.

Innovation For A Better Life

[lg.com/uk/musicflow](http://lg.com/uk/musicflow)



Currys  PC World

\*Available for Android, iOS and PC.

\*\*Battery life usage varies

 **LG**  
Life's Good

# Best home cinema amplifier £1000+

## Pioneer SC-LX59 £1400

**Pioneer's AV receivers** at this price have long done well in our Awards. In fact, they've snapped up the Award every year since 2010.

So what's new? Well, there's now support for DTS:X alongside Dolby Atmos, with the LX59's 9.2 channels and accompanying 11.2 pre-outs facilitating the full 7.2.4 Atmos.

### Exciting sound

There are enough legacy and digital connections to deal with most set-ups, plus now wi-fi and Bluetooth are fully integrated for listening to

music wirelessly. Set-up is a doddle using Pioneer's in-depth MCACC Pro auto calibration.

We play a Blu-ray of *Epic* to begin and are immediately hit with a thoroughly immersive and exciting sound. There's plenty of nuanced attack here, not to mention an impressive level of agility that places sounds around the room with exact precision. There's great enthusiasm too, rendered with a healthy amount of power at 190W per channel, but the SC-LX59 is no slouch when it comes to subtlety or detail either.

Listening to the characters' voices, we get good scope of the humour, anger and sadness in dialogue that many products struggle to deliver.

### Level of musicality

That insight and expression is reflected when using the SC-LX59 to listen to music. Whether listening to a CD or a Blu-ray audio disc, there is plenty of space and a depth to instruments, with a level of musicality such that you might feel that a separate stereo amplifier isn't necessary.

Any doubt Pioneer could improve upon last year's Award-winner will be banished after a couple of hours in the company of the SC-LX59. It's better connected, better equipped for 4K and sounds better than ever, making it a class-leading AV receiver for those really serious about home cinema. At this price, it's one of the soundest investments you can make.

*The **SC-LX59** is better connected, better equipped for 4K and sounds better than ever, making it a class-leading AV receiver for those really serious about home cinema*



## How to set up surround sound

### Subwoofer

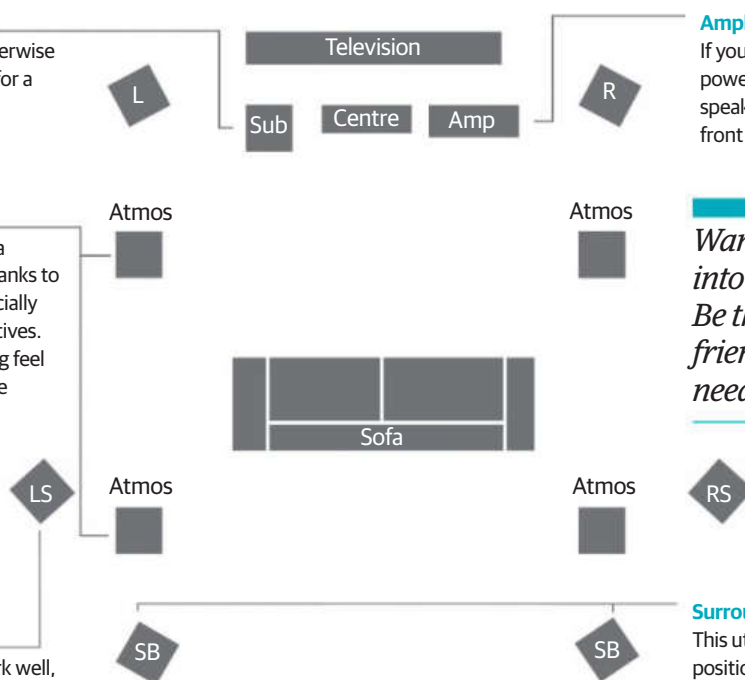
Avoid placing this in a corner, otherwise it will lead to boomy sound. Aim for a smooth, well-integrated sound

### Dolby Atmos

Dolby's new system adds an extra dimension to surround sound, thanks to ceiling-mounted speakers or specially configured upward-firing alternatives. Atmos adds a far more enveloping feel to the surround sound experience

### Surround speakers

Conventional hi-fi stands can work well, but if possible we'd try wall-mounting your surround speakers



### Amplification

If you don't listen in 7.1 or 9.1, don't waste those power-amp channels. You can use them to power speakers in another room, or even to biwire your front speakers, so long as they support that feature

*Want to turn your living room into a fully functioning cinema? Be the envy of your film-loving friends with our guide to all you need to know about getting set up*

### Surround back speakers

This utilises either one or two speakers positioned behind your seat to add more depth to panning effects. If your sofa is against the back wall, in-ceiling speakers can be effective too



# Multi-room systems

Want to spread your music around the house? Not only have your options improved, so has the quality of the best kit you can buy



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best multi-room system £500+

### Bluesound 2nd Generation **from £540**

**Bluesound** had a superb year last year, making its multi-room debut to full five-star acclaim and storming to Product of the Year glory. Despite all that, it seems this is not a company to become complacent. It has listened to feedback and decided that some things needed a rethink, so there's a new look, new features and even a few new products.

This means Bluesound is now offering a bigger ecosystem than ever. It comprises the Node 2 streamer, the Pownode 2 streamer/amplifier, the Vault 2 music server and CD ripper, and the Pulse Mini, Pulse Flex and original Pulse wireless speakers. The latter join the 2.1 Duo sub-sat speaker package as the only products that remain unchanged from last year.

#### From good to better

The new look for the Node 2, Pownode 2 and Vault 2 feels much more grown-up and better thought out – plus they'll fit in your rack without issue. Elsewhere there are now both optical and analogue inputs across the range for connecting legacy sources, a subwoofer out and a built-in headphone amp and jack. Bluetooth aptX is now standard.

This remains one of the most musical multi-room systems we've heard. There's an openness to its presentation that gives voices and instruments space to breathe. Its headline feature remains support of high-res music up to 24-bit/192kHz, which is delivered with added subtlety and dynamic punch. Even so, everything you throw at this system sounds superb.

If you want to go down the more traditional route, the Node 2 and Pownode 2 share the same expressive fluidity to their sound, with a superb handle on dynamics that allows them to convey real differences between the softer and more powerful sections of the music.

The wireless speaker line-up offers something for every room – the Pulse promises big, full-bodied sound with plenty of bass and rich character, while the Pulse Mini loses a bit in the bottom end but remains every bit as articulate and agile. We're yet to test the Pulse Flex but its rechargeable battery pack offers a flexibility that makes this range all-encompassing.

Bluesound's 2nd generation is stronger than ever. It's not the cheapest way to go multi-room but it delivers on performance and features, not to mention high-res support. If that's important to you, it's worth every penny.

# Best multi-room system under £500

## Sonos from £340

For Sonos, the past 12 months have been about tweaking and improving. While other brands have spent the year revamping and rethinking their line-ups, Sonos has been focused on making what it already has even better.

That's a huge part of Sonos's charm. Any product you buy can get even better with time thanks to software upgrades, and that's a refreshing change to the annual replacement cycle in many areas of technology.

This means that despite a whole year with no new products (the new Play:5 came too late for this year's Awards) it still manages to be the best multi-room system at this price.

### Extensive flexibility

A quick reminder of the Sonos product line-up only helps to show just how vast your options are with this kit. Have an

*Each member of the **Sonos** family offers an insightful, full-bodied sound that sings with clarity and enthusiasm. Bass is solid, highs are clean and the midrange dynamic*

existing hi-fi set-up that you want to make multi-room? The Sonos Connect will do that for you. Only got speakers?

Try the Connect:Amp.

The family of Play:5, Play:3

and Play:1 has the integrated-

speaker route covered at

various sizes,

while the Playbar and Sub brings

all of Sonos's multi-room smarts to your home cinema set-up.

Some of the improvements we've seen since the last Awards include a firmware update for the Playbar and the Play:1 speakers to improve their sound - both to great results.

We've also seen Sonos do away with the need for a physical connection to a router, so you can set up directly via wi-fi, making the whole system more flexible and convenient than ever before.

None of this would matter if the system didn't sound great, but Sonos doesn't drop the ball there either.

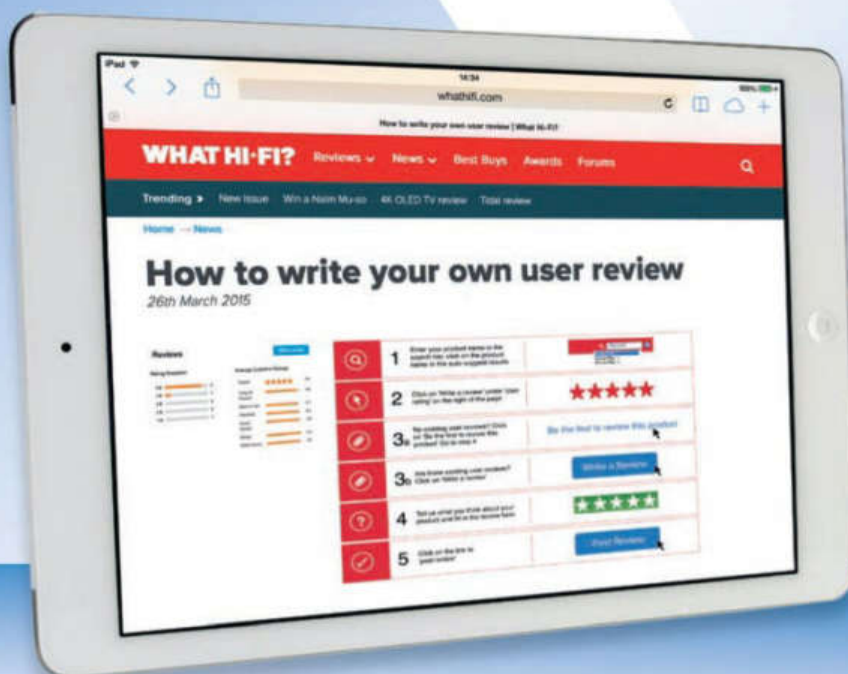


### A close-knit family

There's still no high-res support, but it's hard to be mad about that when the whole system sounds this good. Each member of the family offers an insightful, full-bodied sound that sings with clarity and enthusiasm no matter the genre. Bass is solid, highs are clean and the midrange is dynamic and expressive, plus the user experience remains second to none.

Despite a crowding marketplace, Sonos remains the best way to go multi-room at this price. And yet, somehow, it feels like the best is yet to come.

# We need your product reviews!



## WHAT HI-FI?

If you've recently bought a new hi-fi or home cinema product, or if you've got a classic piece of kit you love, we want to hear all about it.

Go to [whathifi.com](http://www.whathifi.com) and submit a user review for publication online. Your reviews will complement our own and give our readers valuable feedback from owners.

If we think your review deserves it, you could even get a coveted 'Approved Reviewer' badge.

To find out more, go to:

<http://www.whathifi.com/news/how-to-write-your-own-review>



# Blu-ray players

The Blu-ray player is a multi-talented all-rounder. Not only do they give great pictures and sound, they play DVDs and music too



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best Blu-ray player under £150

**Panasonic DMP-BDT370 £100**

In recent years, the budget end of this market has belonged to Sony. The company has always excelled at judging its ratio of performance and features to price. But Panasonic's track record has always been good too, and now it has taken this spot. The DMP-BDT370, the company's top-tier player of 2015, can be had for £100. But is there a catch? Surely there must be a sacrifice somewhere, right?

### Impressive looks, and a smart performance

Not in the design department, certainly. This is a full-width deck, instantly more menacing than its slimmer rivals. This is clearly a machine and not a toy. The metal-effect plastic is convincing: you may not be spending much, but your thrift won't be apparent to the untrained eye.

Inside, you get plenty under the hood: 4K upscaling, wi-fi, DLNA for streaming locally, and twin USB ports for memory sticks. Then there's the smart content, with Netflix, Amazon, BBC iPlayer as the highlights. The interface is a little dated but it's intuitive and responsive. Of course, the main thing is the Blu-ray performance, which is top-notch.

Discs load quickly, and picture and sound performance are very impressive indeed. The image is extraordinarily clear. Details are sharp without looking artificial.

Contrast levels are high, with deep darks and brilliant whites. Colours are rich and vibrant, yet convincingly natural. The Panasonic has a firm hold of motion, even as we spin *Gravity* for its challenging mix of slow pans and active camerawork. We appreciate the inclusion of the picture settings, which let you fine-tune the image without messing with your TV's calibration.

### Substantial sound

But the sound is what impresses us most. Panasonic has always favoured a substantial sound - warm and full-bodied - and this has always gone up against a leaner, more agile offering from Sony. Here, it's the best of both worlds. What you get is rich and weighty, yet spritely enough to attack and entertain. It's a properly slamming presentation. Top-tier specs, features and performance for £100? That's a bargain.

## Best Blu-ray player £150-£300

### Sony BDP-S7200 **£180**

**Another year, another** Award for Sony, whose track record for Blu-ray players is scarily consistent. Take the Sony BDP-S7200, which took this Award last year as well. It's so good that Sony decided it didn't need replacing this year. Rightly so, too - you shouldn't mess with a winning formula, except to lower the price. That's right! Last year's champion can now be had for less.

What does a double-Award winner look like? Surprisingly subdued. The Sony BDP-S7200 has a traditional, minimalist aesthetic - far more attractive and lounge-friendly than the ridiculous rock-inspired designs that Sony toyed with last year.

#### High-res audio and SACD ability

Don't let its unfussy vibe fool you, however. There's plenty going on under the hood,

including 4K upscaling, strong wi-fi and compatibility with high-resolution audio up to 24bit/192kHz WAV, FLAC and DSD files.

The real treat here is the sound quality. It's entertaining, exciting and musical whether you spin Blu-rays, DVD, CDs and even SACDs, for which compatibility is a rare skill these days.

Put on a Blu-ray of *Jurassic World*, and the S7200 demonstrates its great timing, agility and enthusiasm. The Sony musters plenty of power, but also a level of finesse you don't normally hear at this level.

It excels visually, too. It's a stunningly realistic picture, with a great sense of depth and a convincing palette. Edges are finely yet firmly drawn, and the shading is nuanced whether hues are bold or subdued. It's even good with 3D Blu-rays, which enjoy stability and convincing depth.

Standard-definition upscaling is another of the BDP-S7200's skills. The Sony does a great job with a DVD of *John Wick*, which benefits from solid blacks and excellent shadow detail with minimal noise.

#### Nailed the basics

Then there's the Sony's smart functionality, which includes many of the top web-based apps, including Netflix and Amazon Instant Video, BBC iPlayer and Demand 5. It's not the most complete collection of smarts but Sony has nailed down the basics.

With the Blu-ray player market being fairly fast-moving, we're extremely impressed that the Sony BDP-S7200 has even survived for two years, let alone that it has now picked up this Award for two years in a row. It really is that good.



*The real treat here is the sound quality. The **Sony BDP-S7200** is entertaining, exciting and musical whether you spin DVDs, Blu-rays, CDs - or even SACDs*

## Best Blu-ray player £300+

### Cambridge CXU **£900**

**It is a bold** move to put out a £900 Blu-ray player. After all, we've just spent a page and a half extolling the virtues of more affordable alternatives - why would you spend that much money when other hugely capable machines can be had for less?

#### Blu-rays are just the start

But given an appropriate system, it all makes sense. The Cambridge CXU is no ordinary Blu-ray player. For starters, spinning Blu-rays is merely one of its many talents. It is a universal disc player, capable also of playing DVD, CDs and SACDs. On top of that, it is also a DAC and network streamer rolled into one. It supports high-resolution audio up to 24bit/192kHz.

Some budget Blu-ray decks are light and hollow as a lunch box. Not the Cambridge CXU. This is a sleek, robust slab of aluminium. You get premium-quality build, with real care given to the little details - such as the feel of the buttons, the silent glide of the disc tray.

The build and aesthetics make a great first impression, one that Cambridge follows up with a glorious performance. The picture is gorgeous. With crystal clarity and bags of subtlety, it makes for a natural image, helped no end by faithful colours.

It's a dynamic picture too. Light is clean and intense but never glaring. Shadows are deep and gloomy without swallowing up finer details. Colours leap off the screen but never veer into luminous territory. Textures are crisply drawn and naturally etched.

#### Impresses on every level

As much as we enjoy the picture, the real treat is the sound. The CXU has a proclivity for taut, well-timed rhythms and a fluid, musical presentation. Film soundtracks are immersive and impactful - it's properly arresting stuff.

Its talents are even more obvious with two-channel music. Spin a CD and you're treated to richly detailed, spacious and melodic performance. The top end is clean and not too

bright. Vocals are clear and expressive, making the most of Leonard Cohen's baritone growl. The seductively deep and rumbling bassline on *Almost Like the Blues* is taut and controlled.

Yes, £900 is a pricey investment - but few machines can play movies and music at such high quality. If you want a player that impresses on every level, the Cambridge CXU has it all.

*The build and aesthetics make a great first impression, one that the **Cambridge CXU** follows up with a glorious performance. The picture is gorgeous*





# DACS

With much of our music stored in digital form, now is the right time to invest in an Award-winning digital-to-analogue converter



## PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

### Best DAC £400–£800

#### Chord Mojo £400

**Chord Electronics** has destroyed the competition in the DAC category this year, winning three of the four Awards. But as good as the 2Qute and Hugo are, we think the Mojo is the company's crowning achievement.

Unlike some rivals, Chord has long refused to use off-the-shelf DAC chips inside its converters. Instead, the company's digital products feature powerful programmable processors loaded with proprietary software to do the job. The Mojo uses the latest and most powerful processors, which in theory at least makes it the most capable DAC the company makes.

#### Second nature

There's no display as such, but the power button lights up in different colours depending on the sampling rate of the input signal. Similarly, the colour of the lighting behind the volume buttons changes according to level. A little confusing at first, but given time it becomes second nature.

The Mojo is a small unit, yet Chord has found space for a good range of connections. There's (micro) USB, optical and coaxial, though the last takes the form of a 3.5mm jack rather than the usual RCA or BNC.

There's a second USB connection for charging purposes only. Outputs are limited to a pair of 3.5mm jacks.

#### Solid and full-bodied

The Mojo's aircraft-grade aluminium casing is finished to an extremely high standard and once up and running, it's a fabulous performer. We listen to Stevie Wonder's masterpiece *Innervisions* on DSD, and are gripped from the opening bars. There's plenty of detail here, and the kind of insight into the recording that little under a grand can match.

But it's the Mojo's ability to organise all that information into a cohesive and music whole that makes it stand out. It delivers the hard charging rhythm track of *Higher Ground* brilliantly, communicating the songs unstoppable momentum with real enthusiasm.

The presentation is solid, full-bodied but avoids any hint of excess richness at mid and low frequencies. The Mojo offers a large slice of the Hugo's performance for a fraction of the cost. Even at £400 we have to conclude that it's a bargain, and that makes it our Product of the Year.

## Best DAC under £400

### Oppo HA-2 £260

**Oppo keeps us** on our toes – we never know what product category it's going to enter next. So far we've seen headphones, phones, Blu-ray players and now DACs, yet no matter what it does, the results tend to be really good, particularly so when it comes to the HA-2 DAC.

Apart from the leather-clad design, which looks as if it should open like a wallet but doesn't, there's much to admire here.

#### Natural and engaging

The HA-2 is very well specified for the price. There are inputs for USB and mini USB, and for an analogue signal via 3.5mm jack (cables included) meaning you can play through pretty much anything. There are switches for low and high gain to help headphone compatibility, and a bass boost. A full charge takes 90 minutes for up to 13 hours of battery life.

*The **Oppo HA-2** delivers a well-balanced presentation. It has a combination of resolution, dynamic subtlety and surefooted rhythm that no rival can match*

We play the Frightened Rabbit and Manchester Orchestra collaboration *Architect* – using an iPod as source – and are struck by the detail to the sound. The bare arrangement exposes just how intricate and faithful the HA-2's expression is. You can hear the hands picking the guitar strings, each swell and scratch giving the piece its intimacy.

And that character is reflected in the handling of the vocal; the harmonies are full, yet you can hear each voice, sorrowful but unapologetic. It sounds natural and, most importantly, engaging.

#### Anchored, yet buoyant

Playing something more upbeat in the form of Marmaduke Duke's *Rubber Lover*, we try out the bass boost. It certainly emphasises the kick drum that sets the groove, but detail is sacrificed

somewhat and it feels a tiny bit cumbersome. Nonetheless, there's the option for those who want it and it serves to highlight just how well-balanced a sound the HA-2 offers without. Being that tad lighter in the low-end makes livelier tracks such as this feel free. It is anchored enough in the bass, but still buoyant.

#### Sonic talents

Measure the HA-2 against its rivals and you'll find the Oppo delivers a better-balanced presentation than many. It has a combination of resolution, dynamic subtlety and surefooted rhythm that no rival we've heard can match.

Add those sonic talents to excellent build and a surprisingly generous spread of features and it's easy to understand the HA-2's success. It's a fine product, fully deserving of receiving this Award.



## Best DAC £800–£1200

### Chord 2Qute £1000

**Chord's second entry** into our Awards is more of a conventional DAC than either the Mojo or the higher-priced Hugo. Sacrificing the portability of its siblings, it is intended to be part of a traditional home-based hi-fi set-up.

While the 2Qute looks much like last year's winner the Qute EX, it's more closely related to the portable £1400 Hugo in terms of electronics.

#### Incredibly organised

Chord claims its use of bespoke software and programmable chips give it an advantage over rivals using off-the-shelf solutions. It's hard to argue when the results are this good.

The 2Qute DAC sounds incredibly organised and detailed, delivering an effortlessly cohesive and musical performance no matter what song is played. Prince's *Love* (in 16-bit/44.1kHz) sounds funky and punchy, with the DAC's remarkable precision etching out every note with clarity and cohesion. It's a snappy, fun sound that brims with rhythmic drive.

#### Sense of gravitas

Stream *Earth* from the *Gladiator* soundtrack (16-bit/44.1kHz), and it's clear just how easily the 2Qute outperforms not only its predecessor, but all of its rivals. It digs deeper

to reveal even more layers of subtlety, defining the leading and trailing edges of notes with unusual accuracy.

The sense of space is grander, allowing this sparse composition to flow and set the sombre tone at its own pace. We also like how the 2Qute has a delicate touch with piano notes, even as the strings come in with a sense of gravitas.

The 2Qute has three digital inputs – asynchronous USB, coaxial and optical. The coax and USB support high-resolution audio files up to 32-bit/384kHz, while the optical is limited to a still impressive 24bit/192kHz.

#### Visual drama

Build quality is terrific. Chord has used this type of case for a while and it remains a smart, well-finished enclosure. The now traditional change of background lighting colour in the porthole to indicate the signal's sampling rate adds an extra touch of visual drama.

The 2Qute's unerring accuracy, insight and rhythmic drive are impressive. Those who don't need the Hugo's Bluetooth capability or portability would do well to consider this product instead. At the price we haven't come across anything that's better.



*The **Chord 2Qute** DAC sounds incredibly organised and detailed, delivering an effortlessly cohesive and musical performance, no matter what song is played*



## Best DAC £1200+

### Chord Hugo £1400

**The good news** just keeps coming for Chord with its brilliant Hugo holding on to our premium-priced DAC award. This stylish unit was something of a revelation when it was first introduced last year and remains so today.

It's a wonderfully flexible product. Just to clarify, this is a bona fide digital pre-amp with optical and coaxial inputs, two USB sockets, an analogue out, three (yes, three) headphone outputs and, last but not least, aptX Bluetooth connectivity.

#### Extensive features

And it's portable! That's right - Chord has even managed to find room inside that petite aluminium

casework for rechargeable batteries. A two-hour charge should be good enough for 12 hours of use.

But even with this extensive feature set, Chord hasn't taken its eye off the ball with regards to the sound quality. The Hugo is as happy and communicative with a 320kbps Spotify stream as it is feeding off the meaty resolution of a DSD music file.

#### Sit back and enjoy

Start with a basic Bluetooth stream of Minnie Riperton's *Loving You* and the Chord transports you directly to the recording studio. The Hugo's desire for detail and natural tone really

brings her breezy vocals to the fore. The sparse acoustic guitar backing sounds realistic and pure and the upbeat soulful feel of the track is communicated brilliantly.

Move on to something more brutal, such as Hans Zimmer's *Gotham's Reckoning* from the *Dark Knight Rises* soundtrack (24bit/192kHz), and the Hugo responds with enthusiasm.

There's plenty of resolution here, and the kind of fluid dynamics few high-end DACs can match, let alone better. We also like the Hugo's ability to organise all that information into a cohesive whole.

If you want to, you can easily pick out individual instrumental strands and follow those, but this DAC is equally happy for you to sit back and enjoy. Add excellent rhythmic ability and it's clear that this portable unit remains something of a superstar.



*Even with this extensive feature set, Chord hasn't taken its eye off the ball with regards to the sound quality. **Hugo** is as happy with a Spotify stream as with a DSD file*

## System builder

### System builder total build £3370

#### DAC

##### Chord Mojo £400 ★★★★★

Where better to start than with our Product of the Year? The Chord Mojo is a small unit which boasts a good range of connections, and is a fabulous performer. There's plenty of detail and insight into the recording, but it's the Mojo's ability to organise all that information into a cohesive whole that makes it stand out. Even at £400 we have to conclude it's a bargain.



#### Streaming services

##### Tidal £20/month ★★★★★

Since it relaunched in March, Tidal has impressed us with its CD-quality streaming service. The £20/month subscription (£10/month for lower-quality) feels a fair price to pay for an ever-expanding music catalogue, exclusive content, videos and lossless audio. It hasn't been around long, but Tidal has become a streaming service to reckon with.



#### Laptop

##### Apple Macbook Air from £750

The MacBook Air is Apple's slimmest laptop, and deserves a place in our testing rooms because it's good to use, light and easy to carry and exceptionally fast. It's ideal for playing both movies and music, though we'd suggest upgrading iTunes to dedicated music playing software, such as Pure Music. Other laptops are available, but this is still one of our favourites.



#### Stereo Amplifier

##### Rega Elex-R £900 ★★★★★

Rega's upmarket stereo amplifier is good enough to have shaken up a market that has long been dominated by the likes of Cyrus, Roksan and Naim. The Elex-R gets straight to the heart of the music, delivering a fast, agile sound that demonstrates authority and scale better than anything we've heard at this price.



#### Headphones

##### Grado SR325e £300 ★★★★★

Grado's SR325es replaced our long-time favourites, the SR325is, but also brought improvements to the motor system and housing, a wider cushioned headband and 360 degree rotating earcups. They're not the head-turners you might expect for £300, but they feel sturdy and solid. Winners of the Best home on-ears category in our 2015 Awards, the musical, detailed sound of the Grados makes them a truly top buy.



#### Stereo Speakers

##### Tannoy Revolution XT6F £1000 ★★★★★

These Tannoys are incredible speakers for the money - you get an entertaining listen that has no problem attracting your undivided attention. Whatever you throw at them will be handled with precision and agility. They are beautifully finished too, but more importantly they sound every bit of their asking price.





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# Turntables

The resurgence in vinyl has put the turntable back at the forefront of your hi-fi system. And these three Award-winners show you why



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best turntable £400-£800

**Rega RP3/Elys2 £550**

Anything securing a Product of the Year award could be said to be remarkable, but this winner deserves more remarks than any other. This is the fifth consecutive year the Rega RP3/Elys2 combo has clinched the POTY title. If you'll forgive the pun, we think that's a record. It's certainly a stunning achievement for a pretty unassuming-looking product.

You can buy this turntable without a cartridge, but we recommend getting the package that includes Rega's excellent Elys2 moving-magnet cartridge. It adds around £75, bringing the cost to £550, but the money is well spent. The cartridge comes pre-fitted.

### A winning formula

In previous years Rega has made subtle but worthwhile improvements to this deck (revised arm design, plinth reinforcement) but this year, rather than tinker further with a great product, the company has simply stuck to a winning formula – a policy justified by the fine sound this deck produces. Clarity, strong dynamics and musical stability are powerfully in evidence alongside fine balance and great resolution.

The RP3 has all the power and dynamic thrust to make the most of Bob Marley's *Exodus*, and the insight to differentiate musical strands even when things get demanding. There's composure, and ability to communicate the rhythmic flow and changes of pace well. Subtlety is on offer here too, as John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* proves.

### Heart of the performance

The deck is easy to set up and easy to use too, and the only potential inconvenience is the manual speed change. All turntables need a decent, level support, but here it's even more important: three rubber feet will only go so far when it comes to isolation. It needs a rigid, low-resonance platform to truly shine, and positioning well away from speakers is preferable. Get this aspect of set-up right and the Rega simply sings.

The RP3/Elys2 combination gets straight to heart of the performance, and delivers plenty of emotion. This is a deck that has been decades in the making and the result is enduring excellence – don't bet against it filling this spot again in 2016.

## Best turntable under £400

### Pro-Ject Essential II £210

**It's a testament** to the quality of the three winners in this category that each has retained its title. A year might be a long time in the world of hi-fi, but it hasn't been long enough for any disc-spinning newcomers to dislodge our triumphant trio of turntables.

#### Quality components

The Essential II is pretty basic: there's no headline-grabbing material or technology here, just quality components - including a great main bearing - and fine build at a competitive price. The inclusion of a pre-fitted Ortofon OM5e moving-magnet cartridge in the price adds to the appeal - let it run in for a while and your reward will be a winning performance.

Spin Paul Dukas's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* and the Pro-Ject delivers a sound full of life and drama. There's plenty of detail, and enough

*The **Pro-Ject Essential II** is pretty basic: there's no headline-grabbing material or technology here, just quality components and fine build at a competitive price*



refinement from that Ortofon cartridge to stop things getting edgy. We're pleased with the deck's scale and composure - these qualities aren't common with this kind of product at this price. Make sure you place it on a rigid support as far away from your speakers as you can - there's not much in the way of suspension and the Essential II thrives on isolation.

Michael Jackson's *Bad* demands a crisp sense of rhythm, and the Essential II is happy to oblige. There's plenty of drive and punch, underpinned by surprisingly articulate low frequencies.

#### Perfect budget deck

The Pro-Ject hasn't got the analysis to strip bare a recording like this, but neither does anything else in this price band. What it does is deliver the music in an exciting and entertaining way. It keeps us listening, wanting more, and that's what makes it special.

The Pro-Ject Essential II is the perfect budget deck. It's sensibly priced and well made, but most of all it sounds great. Sure, you can get better performance - but you'll have to spend a lot more to do so.

## Best turntable £800+

### Clearaudio Concept £995



**In common with** the other two winners in this turntable category, Clearaudio's Concept has retained its crown without changing a thing.

Unlike some rival designs in this upper price segment which require patience, a steady hand and a passable grasp of mathematics, the Concept is a 'plug-and-play' product.

#### Clean design

The company's own MM Concept cartridge is fitted to the Verity Direct Wire Plus tonearm,

and Clearaudio sets everything, up to and including cartridge weight and bias, before it leaves the factory. All that's left to do is fit the platter and drive belt - then the Clearaudio is ready to play.

We're in favour of products that make the ownership experience special and this Clearaudio does just that. It's brilliantly made, combining simple lines with a top-quality finish. In fact, before dropping a record into place, it's worth taking a moment to admire the Concept's clean design and chunkily substantial appearance.

Speed (33⅓, 45 and 78rpm) is controlled by a hefty rotary dial, and the whole thing exudes the sort of solidity more usually associated with outside waterclosets.

#### One-stop solution

The Concept has a fast and agile sound that picks up subtleties with ease. It has strong dynamics and sonic precision, and is at home

with all types of music. It also possess a neutrality of character that means it will fit comfortably into most systems.

With Michael Jackson's *Thriller* in place, the Clearaudio is little short of thrilling. It thunders through the plentiful low-frequency action with poise and pace to spare, combining punch, extension and tonal variance in equal measure.

Dynamic potency is never in doubt, and the Concept's timing is crisp enough to grant momentum and drive to the trickiest of recordings without losing composure or focus.

The Clearaudio's strengths are untouched by time: in a market sector where most audiophiles prefer to optimise sound by mixing and matching, it remains the ideal one-stop solution.

Few rivals at this price look classier. But great build and appearance aren't enough to win a Best Buy. The Concept wins because it sounds great.

*In a market sector where most audiophiles optimise sound by mixing and matching, the **Clearaudio Concept** remains the ideal one-stop solution*



# Televisions

Telly-world paints a pretty picture these days: more (and better) smart services, the rise of 4K and tumbling prices. Just pick a screen size



**PRODUCT** OF THE **YEAR**

## Best 47-52in TV under £1000

**Samsung UE48J6300 £580**

**The very first** 48in Full HD Samsung model sat proud in this spot last year as the best TV deal of 2014, and now another has arrived to repeat history - only this one is curved (very curved) and, believe it or not, even better. If you're prioritizing size over resolution (there's no 4K here) and have this budget in mind, this Samsung may as well have your name on it.

Unlike the gentle curvature of most concave screens we've seen, the UE48J6300 looks like it's been bent by Hulk mid-temper. You get the less-than-perfect wide viewing angles part and parcel of curved screens, but it does make for a striking aesthetic. A conversation-starter, no less. The chunky frame goes for reassuring sturdiness over outright elegance, though elsewhere style is a big part of this set's vocabulary.

### Smooth and full-bodied

We're big fans of Samsung's redesigned smart interface. Gone is last year's full-page portal design and in its place is a pop-up overlay of tiles providing instant access to apps, sources and recent and recommended content. It's a responsive, user-friendly design. Smarts are well covered:

Netflix, Amazon Prime Instant and YouTube are all present, alongside catch-up TV services aplenty - only Demand 5 is missing at the moment.

The picture is instantly likeable: wonderfully crisp and clear with layer upon layer of detail and a pleasing colour tone that's rich yet realistic. We enter post-apocalyptic San Francisco in *Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes* on Blu-ray and the greens of the mossy buildings and jungle are vivid and subtly shaded. Whether it's day or night, there's clarity and definition to the trees and nuance to the apes' coats. The Samsung pays just as much attention to humans too; skin-tones are convincingly fleshed out and crowds are well defined, appearing with a fine sense of depth. Even an SD channel, though obviously softer, is surprisingly clean and coherent.

The Samsung bucks the trend for tinny-sounding flatscreens thanks to its smooth, full-bodied, balanced delivery. There's weight at the bottom end, no brightness at the top and a real sense of openness to the sound.

Samsung has fashioned more than one great-value TV this year, but none as compelling as the UE48J6300. If you don't mind coming aboard the curve, you won't find a better performer for the money.

## Best 40-46in TV under £500

### Panasonic TX-40CS520 **£380**

**A stonkingly good** deal. That's what this cheap-and-cheerful Panasonic set is. We may have seen less hoo-ha around 32in sets of late, as bigger 4K screens steal the spotlight, but the trusty and ever-popular 40in is here to stay. Panasonic's TV division has had a good year, finding its feet again after a rather average 2014,

and has come up trumps with this modest set from its mid-ranging Full HD line-up. At a mere £380, this is testament to just how good an affordable TV can be. Save for the absence of 3D, it's as feature-full as they come, jam-packed with the latest smarts, accessible via an ethernet connection or (built-in) wi-fi. A couch potato's delight, the Panasonic not only gets you the most popular on-demand services (Netflix, Amazon Prime Instant Video and YouTube) at the push of a button, it chucks in all of the UK's catch-up services for good measure too - bragging rights not even some flagship sets have.

While Panasonic's higher-end models are powered by Firefox OS, this budget telly sticks with last year's customisable My Home Screen, which is no bad thing. It's easy to

navigate and fast-tracks you to your favourite apps quicker than you can say Netflix. It's performance that seals the Best Buy tag, though.

#### **Vivid yet natural**

Whether it's fed a Blu-ray or DVD, this screen produces a stable, solid picture that's hugely enjoyable to watch. Colours are vivid yet natural in tone, detail is abundant and crisp, and subtlety is handed to you on a plate. Buttery-smooth motion means any fast-action scenes fly by without a hiccup, and strong contrast makes the picture all the more dramatic.

The speakers pack a fair punch. Dialogue is clear and articulate and whether it's the sound of gunshots or revving car engines, they pull through with a surprising amount of solidity.

As a package, this Panasonic is very impressive and as easy on the eye as on the wallet.

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*The **Panasonic** not only gets you the most popular on-demand services at the push of a button, it chucks in all of the UK's catch-up services for good measure too*

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## Best 40-46in TV £500+

### Samsung UE40JU7000 **£880**

**Who'd have thought**, this time last year, that one of our most affordable 2015 TV Best Buys would be 4K? If anything shows the technology is now more accessible than ever, it's this 40in Samsung, the smallest size screen the Korean giant (or seemingly any other brand) has to offer in UHD, and one that won't leave your bank account wincing.

#### **Smooth and full-bodied**

You only need to dabble with a 4K Netflix stream to see how incredible this TV can look. Pictures are as pin-sharp and clean as we've seen, but it's the fine detail and insight on offer that really makes this picture shine. Textures are realised with precision and are never over-etched. And colours are bold and vivid, but not overdone. Blacks go impressively deep while retaining their detail, and whites have

the ability to push through a scene with brightness and clarity, without disturbing the darker areas around them.

Motion proves another strong suit, the Samsung able to handle fast-action scenes without a blip. What's more, you can sit right up close with zero eye-strain or discernible picture noise. The story is much the same as we switch to Blu-ray, the JU7000 proving a tremendous upscaler, and broadcast programmes (take your pick between Freeview HD and Freesat) are perfectly watchable.

Outlines are softer and less defined with SD channels, but nevertheless the level of detail remains admirable.

Audio performance doesn't let the side down either. It's weightier than you might expect. Richer, too.

Getting online (the wired or wireless way) opens doors to the set's generous on-demand apps and smart content, and external sources all connect to the plug-in

One Connect Mini box, which holds the lion's share of connections for easier access.

The UE40JU7000 is a superb all rounder. Didn't think you could get good 4K at 40in? Think again.




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*You only need to dabble with a 4K Netflix stream to see how incredible this TV can look. It's the fine detail and insight on offer that really makes this picture shine*

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## Best 47-52in TV £1000+

### Samsung UE48JU7000 £1200

**Invariably, those after** both screen real-estate and pixel-packing resolution will have to fork out a figure on the meaner side of £1000. And, although you can splash out even more for a higher-ranging model, we think your money is best spent on the Samsung UE48JU7000.

The proof is in the performance. Given the number of pixels in 4K (eight million, if you'd

forgotten), you'd expect a super-sharp picture – and that's what you get. Edges are strongly defined and textures well mapped. Contrast is excellent, with blacks surprisingly deep for an LED TV and whites dazzling without washing out their surrounding areas.

Colours are punchy and expertly judged – a little more on the vibrant side than last year's screens, which occasionally seemed a little under-saturated.

Skin-tones look entirely natural and there are handfuls of subtlety to tuck into too. And as the camera pans and objects whizz across the screen, there isn't a judder in sight.

It's a champ at upscaling too. Blu-rays look impressively clear, crisp and well-judged, even if the detail level drops slightly, and DVDs won't need to be consigned to the bin either.

Sound quality doesn't let the side down. Weightier

than we expect from a flatscreen, its above-par delivery is so open we're not compelled to reach for a soundbar at the first opportunity.

#### Navigation made easy

The list of positives only lengthens as we navigate our way around this telly. The smart, customisable Tizen-based interface is as smooth and speedy as ever, unlocking truckloads of apps and catch-up services in a matter of one or two button presses. And we love that you can switch between live TV, apps and the TV's inputs (four HDMI and three USBs included) as you would change channels too. Its sleek, slim physique completes what's a very convincing all-round package.

What your money gets you here is a tempting blend of performance, ease of use and looks, and not a penny is left unaccounted for.

*Given the number of pixels in 4K, you'd expect a super-sharp picture – and that's what you get. Edges are strongly defined and textures well mapped*



## Best 52-60in TV under £2500

### Samsung UE55JS8500 £2100

**Good news: TV** prices are dropping quicker than a dodgy facelift. In just five months, this Samsung (yes, another Samsung) has shed a whopping £500, making it even more irresistible if big-screen 4K thrills are your prerogative. The UE55JS8500 marks the first of Samsung's three flagship SUHD ranges, of which the talking point is the company's take on nano-crystal technology – a thin layer of tiny crystals in the display panel that emit light in various colours according to their size.

It supposedly offers 64 times more colour expression and 2.5 times more brightness than traditional tellies. Hard stats to verify, yes, but it would be easy to take Samsung's word for it. Across resolutions (Ultra HD to DVD), the TV produces a striking picture. Marvel's *Daredevil* in 4K is an engrossing watch – even in the title sequence the razor-sharp lines and the way the

pink graphics leap off the screen blow us away. A Blu-ray picture is still remarkably defined, with sharp yet subtle outlines basking in realism, and every corner of the 55in screen filled with fine detail.

#### Rich, solid, deep and natural

Colour reproduction is this telly's forte, the palette rich and solid with deep, natural hues. Contrast is exemplary too, with blacks especially impressive. The Freeview HD tuner (there's Freesat too) keeps the praise flowing: high-def programmes draw no complaints, and SD channels look cleaner than you might expect.

The Samsung's rich, full-bodied sound is a pleasant surprise, and it can go pretty loud too. 3D advocates will need to make glasses a future investment, though.

Design-wise, the UE55JS8500 is a beauty. The curved screen looks as if

it's suspended in the air above its stand, and it's hard to pick a favourite between the regular, intuitive remote and fancy, banana-shaped smart one. Both navigate the fresh, straightforward OS like a dream.

Nothing if not desirable, the UE55JS850 is a stupendous screen for the size and money, and one that's definitely worth pride of place in your living room.

*Marvel's Daredevil in 4K is an engrossing watch on the UE55JS8500; the razor-sharp lines and the way the graphics leap off the screen blow us away*



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\* Screen image shown is simulated

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**NETFLIX**

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## Best 52-60in TV £2500+

### LG 55EG960V £3800

**This range-topping LG** is our first taste of 4K OLED (the Holy Grail of resolution and panel technology in the TV industry right now) and, boy, are we impressed.

An OLED panel consists of pixels made up of organic carbon-based film, which light up when a current is put through them. Unlike LCD screens, which need

a backlight, OLED pixels are self-lighting, so when a pixel turns off, it's pitch black and carries no residual light. That means you get proper inky blacks without sacrificing brightness.

To say it delivers on its promise is an understatement. With 4K streams, we're blown away by the detail on display. The depth of colour is breathtaking - hues are rich yet natural and precisely shaded - and contrast is strong, even when you're watching off-axis. Textures in blacks and nuances in whites jump out at you too. Give motion a helping hand with de-judder processing modes and the picture's very stable.

Blu-ray playback is just as captivating. Skin-tones look natural and fleshed

out, while rich detail and textures make faces and objects look tactile.

The passive 3D effect (four pairs of glasses are included) is gentle on your eyes, but the depth offered by OLED is utterly immersive.

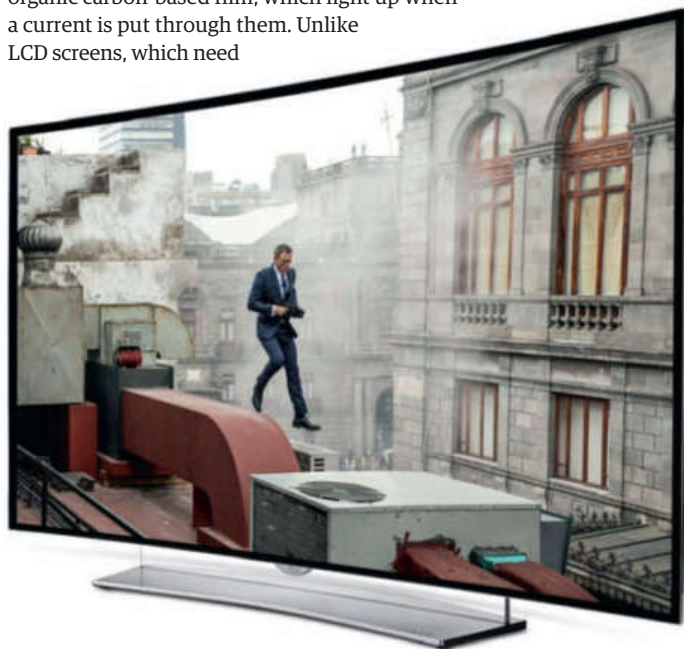
#### Just what you're waiting to hear

LG has teamed up with Harman Kardon for the audio side of things, and with good results. The delivery is smooth, weighty and expressive.

The second iteration of last year's slick WebOS interface is even quicker and more intuitive than its forerunner. New shortcuts let you access your favourite smarts (whether that's Netflix, Amazon, iPlayer or Demand5) in a flash.

Thanks to its wafer-thin panel and gorgeous floating-screen effect, the 55EG960V looks every bit as special as it is. 4K OLED is the TV future and, if this LG is anything to go by, we're sold.

*This top-ranging **LG 55EG960V** is our first taste of 4K OLED (the Holy Grail of resolution and panel tech in the TV industry now) and, boy, are we impressed*



## Best 60in+ TV

### Samsung UE65JS8500 £3000

**Samsung's JS8500 series** has become something of a go-to range, raking in the Awards first with its 55in and now with the 65in variant. As you'd expect, it too features the brand's proprietary SUHD nano-crystal technology, smarts more fruitful than a vegetable plot (Netflix, Amazon, catch-up TV, you know the drill) and a gorgeous, insightful picture - just in a bigger, equally as smart, gently curved screen.

#### Looks good - even before you turn it on

Its understated design is tidy and well finished, from the finger-width bezels to the curved sturdy stand, and even the back panel has a stylish ribbed texture.

Eyes to the front and it's hard not to be glued to the screen when it's playing native content. Threadlike lines and punch-packing colour eat up every pixel. Its devotion to detail, dramatic

*Threadlike lines and punch-packing colour eat up every pixel. The **Samsung's** devotion to detail, dramatic depth and natural hues speak volumes about realism*

depth and natural hues speak volumes about realism, while its motion-savvy delivery is smooth enough not to warrant much in the way of processing modes. Whites are clinical and inky blacks leave room for detail, so you're not left in the dark (literally) during gloomier scenes.

A caveat of curved screens is their often non-consistent viewing angles, but here angles are good, probably due to the slightness of the curvature.

Take a tea break before you drop to Blu-ray and you won't immediately notice the downgrade. Even a dated DVD copy of *Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi* is surprisingly sanitary.

It goes without saying a TV of this size and calibre would be more at home partnered with a surround-

sound package or a high-end soundbar but, that said, the in-built speakers do a creditable job.

As is plain to see on these past few pages, Samsung has had a mighty good year with its TVs and the UE65JS8500 really plants a flag in the ground. If a big screen and 4K resolution are must-haves in your eyes, then we'd say your search is over.

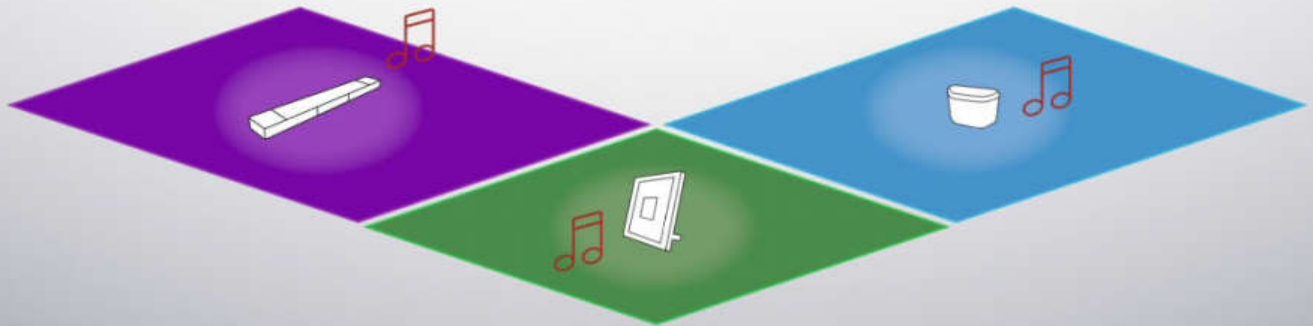






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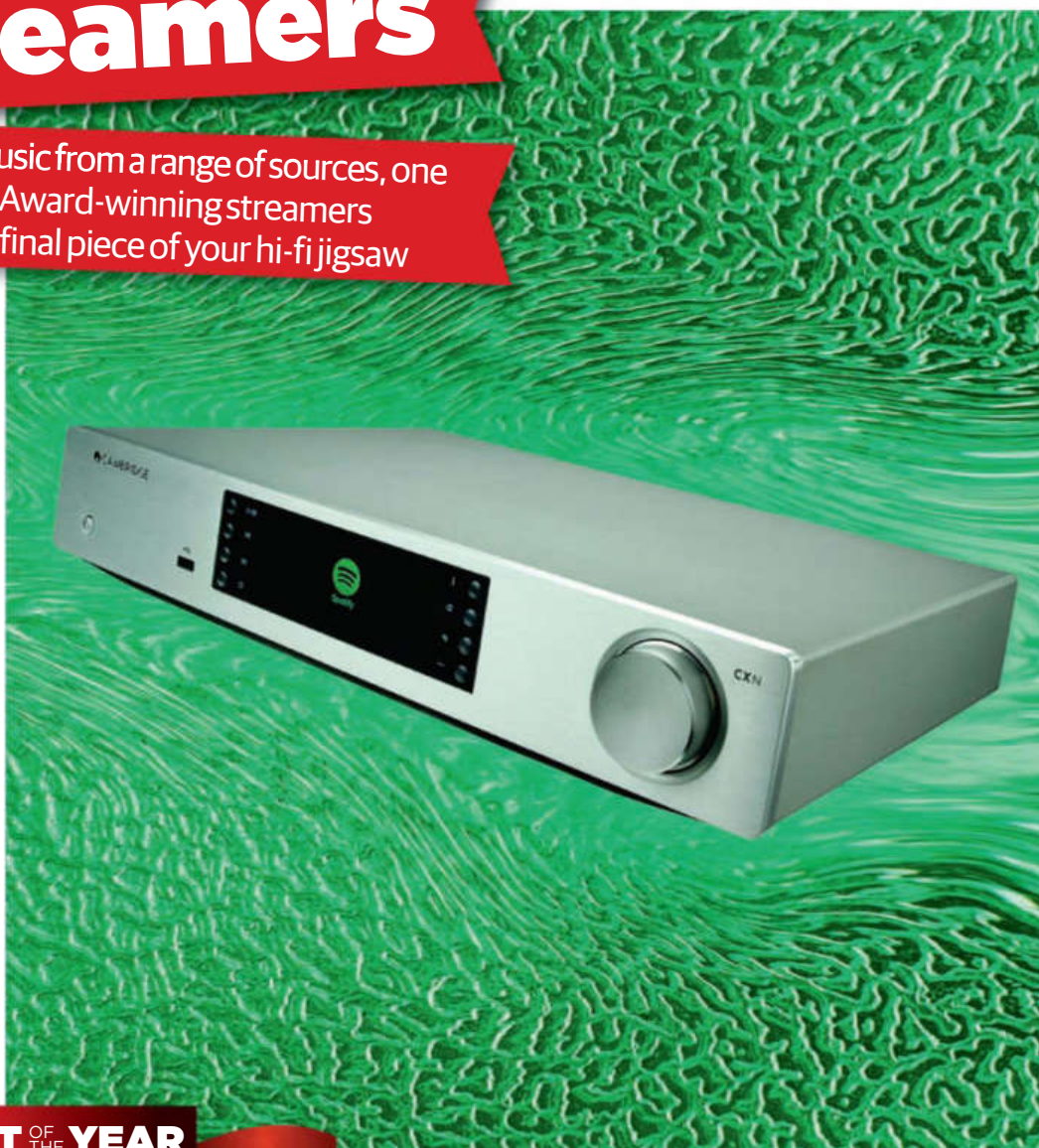
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# Streamers

If you play music from a range of sources, one of these five Award-winning streamers could be the final piece of your hi-fi jigsaw



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best streamer £500–£1000

### Cambridge CXN £700

**Cambridge Audio** is back with a vengeance this year, with its new CX series garnering a slew of five-star reviews. The CXN streamer is one of the jewels in the line up, wowing us with its new sleek and shiny design, its ease of use and its excellent performance.

The CXN builds on the Award-winning Stream Magic v6 streamer, but a fresh design makes it feel like a complete overhaul. With classy brushed-aluminium casework, a delightful control dial and a punchy, 4.3in full-colour display, it feels far more premium than its price suggests.

But it's the hugely enjoyable sonic performance that makes the CXN our Product of the Year. Basslines are meaty and solid, and there's a lively sense of rhythm. Voices are rich and smooth, and the expansive, full-bodied sound fills the room with easy-flowing dynamics.

#### Complexity with cohesion

The Cambridge CXN has an exhaustive spread of connectivity: if you have a music file stored somewhere, the streamer will probably play it, regardless of recording quality. It also features Spotify Connect and

internet radio, so you have access to a few million more songs. There's support for AirPlay, you'll need a separate dongle for Bluetooth.

File support is extensive: all the popular formats such as WAV, FLAC, AIFF, ALAC and MP3 are supported, up to 24-bit/192kHz, as well as DSD 64 files (which you can play using the back-panel USB input). In fact, all three USB (type A) ports can charge your smartphone – Apple and Android – but will only play back media stored on sticks or hard drives. A pair of RCA analogue and balanced XLR inputs, two optical inputs and a USB type B port for hardwiring your laptop are also available.

Switching between inputs and scrolling through your music library goes smoothly with the redesigned remote control. There's a decent app as well, but we like using the intuitive handset more.

In fact, the CXN is an absolute joy to use – every aspect of the streamer has been given such careful attention that it's sure to win people over. The functionality, design and ease of use are the best we've seen at this price, and the engaging sound it provides makes it one of the most pleasing products we've heard this year.



## Best streamer under £500

### Pioneer N-50A £500

Pioneer's original N-50 proved to be such a formidable streamer that we gave it two successive Awards after its initial release in 2012. When the Bluesound Node took its spot last year, Pioneer knew it had to up its game.

And it has. The N-50A delivers a superb streaming experience at £500 – beating the new Node 2. It's a toe-tapping performance, rhythmically adept and fluidly dynamic. Whether you're streaming from Spotify or playing a high-res file (the N-50A supports up to 32-bit/192kHz and DSD64), it combines precision and punch to make for an engaging listen. Voices are expressive: the lilting vocals of Swedish folk duo First Aid Kit are conveyed with a great level of nuance and agility.

#### Airy soundstage

Bass notes make an impact without being too imposing, while the sparkling top end gives a sense of attack. Instruments are spaced out in the airy soundstage. It's a clean delivery, packed with detail and hugely enjoyable to listen to.

The N-50A is a well-built metal box, which looks and feels like a quality item. We are fans of the brushed-aluminium fascia and its modern, minimalist vibe. The colour LCD screen, which felt cramped in the original N-50, has been



bumped up to 3.5in, giving more space for track information and album covers. The app isn't quite as slick as the responsive and well-laid out remote control, but the N-50A is easy to use regardless.

The list of features is impressive at this price. The N-50A has DLNA certification, which lets you play any song stored on your home

network, be it on a laptop or a NAS box. Two types of USB connection let you plug in iPods, memory sticks or laptops for playback, while optical and coaxial inputs complete the list.

#### Gateway to hi-fi streaming

The N-50A features Spotify Connect and AirPlay for wireless streaming, and there's also a wired ethernet port for a more stable network access. However, if you want wi-fi and Bluetooth, you'll have to buy optional adapters for both.

The N-50A is a great gateway into the world of hi-fi streaming at a very affordable price. Its set of features is excellent, it's slick to use, and that snappy, fluid performance is easy to get along with. A well-deserved win.

*The N-50A is a gateway into the world of hi-fi streaming at a very affordable price. Features are excellent, and that performance is easy to get along with*

## Best streamer £1000–£1500

### Cyrus Stream Xa £1250



Cyrus streamers have become a regular annual presence in the *What Hi-Fi?* Awards since music streamers became a permanent category back in 2011.

The Cyrus Stream Xa won this category last year, and so far we haven't found a rival that's been able to touch it.

#### Effortlessly musical

Speedy, nimble and precise – the Cyrus Xa is one of the most energetic and yet remarkably controlled streamers out there.

Stunning clarity and razor-sharp precision are its sonic hallmarks, but an insightful approach prevents the Xa from sounding clinical. It is effortlessly musical and, although its character

is lean rather than rich, the Xa's sense of organisation and expert handling of rhythm is unparalleled in this price bracket.

Dynamically, it's superb. The masterful control over dynamic upheavals is rivalled only by the Xa's liveliness and subtlety with voices.

#### Engaging and transparent

Tonally, the Cyrus takes the middle path: the midrange is lucid and detailed, equally spread between a sparkly treble that's clear and controlled, and a tuneful, agile bass. Engaging and transparent, the Stream Xa has a rare knack for drawing you into a song and keeping you

there. But unless you are already aware of Cyrus's reputation, you wouldn't be able to tell just by looking at it that the Xa is capable of sounding so captivating.

The half-width, die-cast aluminium chassis has been around for nearly 20 years, and is looking decidedly old-fashioned now. Even the black-on-green display looks like a computer screenshot from a 1990s hacker film. It remains perfectly serviceable in use, though, with instinctively responsive buttons and controls.

#### Stands out amongst rivals

Thankfully, you do get the choice of a fancy 'n-remote' or the Cadence app, both of which are far better alternatives for scrolling through your music library than persisting with the very limited display.

Dated appearance aside, the Xa's sound quality stands out among rivals at all prices. It may be in urgent need of an aesthetic redesign to bring it up to date, but we think you'll forget about looks the second you start playing music.

If you're not ready to make the jump to a Naim but want something that, sonically, is a step up from the Cambridge CXN, then the Cyrus Stream Xa could be the perfect upgrade for you.

*It is effortlessly musical and, although its character is lean rather than rich, the Xa's sense of organisation and handling of rhythm is unparalleled*

## Best streamer £1500+

### Naim ND5 XS £2250

**Much like Cyrus**, Naim has been a permanent fixture in the streamers category from its inception. Expertise in the field has given it an advantage over other brands when it comes to combining hi-fi sound with top-end streaming features. The latest to join a long list of Naim Award-winners is the ND5 XS.

#### Exhaustive features

Feed the ND5 XS well-recorded, high-resolution music, and it shines. Kate Bush's *50 Words For Snow* (24-bit/96kHz) bursts through with confidence and authority like no other. Each lilt and inflection of her vocals is enunciated through the streamer with startling precision. It's such an accomplished performance that it feels effortless - each element of the song is cleanly and accurately delivered in a musically cohesive soundstage. Captivating and immersive, the Naim flourishes given the appropriate partners.

Along with Spotify Connect and vTuner internet radio giving you access to a world of music, Naim has included support for Tidal - a great addition to a well-specified streamer.

The ND5 XS is a fully UPnP player, meaning it will play just about anything you can connect to it, including songs stored across NAS boxes,

laptops and smart devices. Connect the ND5 XS to your home network, via wi-fi or wire, and you'll be able to stream all popular file formats up to 24-bit/192kHz high-resolution, including DSD64 tracks. Bluetooth streaming, analogue and digital connections complete a very exhaustive feature list.

*Everything has been carefully planned to make it as seamless as possible. Coupled with the sonic performance, it's no wonder this **ND5 XS** streamer reigns supreme*



Unlike the Cyrus, the Naim's sturdy, minimalist design has a modern feel to it, with the buttons and menu responding swiftly. The slick iOS/Android control app is perfect for scrolling through vast libraries of music across multiple sources - Naim has carefully considered just how intuitive it is to control a streamer using a tablet or smartphone.

#### Forward-thinking

Everything about Naim's streamer has been carefully planned to make it as seamless as possible. It's a very forward-thinking approach from an established hi-fi company and, coupled with the brilliant sonic performance, it's no wonder this high-end ND5 XS reigns supreme.

## Best streaming box

### Amazon Fire TV £80



Netflix, Demand 5, Spotify, YouTube, and many, many more - you won't run out of things to watch, that's for sure. It also has a huge selection of games, making it one of the best-stocked media players out there.

Amazon claims a 75 per cent increase in processing power, and the new Fire TV certainly feels slicker and nippier when we put it through its paces.

**The new Amazon Fire TV box** has a trick up its sleeve: 4K Ultra HD support. It's the first and only streaming box so far to have 4K support, and with better performance than before, more apps and a sub-£100 price tag, it's a tantalising offer.

#### A better app selection

The Fire TV is packed with apps and features. Amazon's own on-demand services are present (Instant, Prime Video & Music), but the app offering has improved somewhat from last year.

There's still no Now TV or All 4, but it does have ITV Player, which joins BBC iPlayer,

we've thrown Chiwetel Ejiofor and Benedict Cumberbatch at it). In use, it's smooth and instinctive.

Picture quality is crisp and punchy across Full HD and 4K streams alike, and sound quality is solid - it's an involving watch as long as your TV and sound system are also up to the challenge.

#### 4K: life in the fast stream

Of course, you'll also need a broadband connection that's up to the task, especially if you'll be streaming full-fat 4K titles like *Daredevil* on Netflix or Amazon Prime's own *Bosch*. You're looking at 15Mbps as a minimum.

The built-in wi-fi is stable, but we prefer the ethernet connection for more reassurance. As expected, there's HEVC support, along with a single HDMI 2.0 port for 4K compatibility. It also supports Dolby Audio up to 7.1 surround sound. The optical input has been taken away, but you do get a USB port and a microSD slot for expanding the internal 8GB storage up to 128GB.

We have to hand it to Amazon: the new Fire TV is a significant improvement over its predecessor, and the 4K support gives it the edge over rivals from Apple, Roku and Google. It's a joy to use.

*Buffering times are mercifully quick, the **Amazon Fire TV's** picture is crisp and punchy across Full HD and 4K streams alike, and sound quality is solid*



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Pioneer VSX-930 | September 2015



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# Speaker packages

From traditional surround-sound speakers to compact and affordable style packages, there's a speaker set to suit your budget



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best traditional package £1000-£2000

### Monitor Audio Bronze B5 AV **£1500**

**When it came** to upgrading its Bronze home speaker packages, Monitor Audio used technology from higher up the range. The result is a Product of the Year with a sound that suggests a much heftier price tag.

The B5 AV comprises the Bronze Centre, two Bronze FX surround speakers and Bronze W10 subwoofer – as do all Bronze packages – and a pair of Bronze 5 floorstanding speakers for front channels.

#### Scale and intensity

The technology upgrade centres on new C-CAM (Ceramic-Coated Aluminium/Magnesium drivers). For the mid/bass drivers, the stiffness and damping quality of that dished cone aids cone control and reduction in cone break-up. The tweeter's C-CAM dome is gold-anodised for that same stiffness and also dampening, meaning, hopefully, the sound won't harden at its highest frequencies.

We play the Blu-ray of *Taxi Driver*. Immediately we are struck by the film's jazz accompaniment; the instruments are brilliantly organised, expressive and rhythmic. The sound dates the film as much as the flared

trousers do, but voices are warm and expressive. There is depth to sounds such as the fizz of Travis's Alka-Seltzer and attack to the gunshots, as the Bronze B5 AV explores the nuances of the film's dejected, lonely feel.

Changing tack with *ParaNorman*, the Bronze B5 AV is equally comfortable with the scale and intensity of the modern-day family-focused animation. Those same characteristics of rhythm, detail and organisation are still clear as the zombies chase Norman and co through the woods. The surround-sound field is cohesive without being restrained, delivering perilous thrills and slapstick humour with ease.

#### Worthy champion

Unsurprisingly, the results are much the same in stereo. We play LCD Soundsystem's *Sound Of Silver* album and, though we are still using an A/V receiver and not a stereo amplifier, we remain impressed by the balance, dynamics and expressiveness, which keep us hooked.

The Bronze B5 AV delivers a sound that is capable of great subtlety and dynamics, muscular yet musical. A more-than worthy champion.



## Best traditional package under £1000

### Dali Zensor 15.1 £980

**There's still nothing** to rival Dali for less than a grand. The Zensor 1 5.1 package this year receives its third Award, the previous two as our Product of the Year, and its command of this area of the market shows no signs of waning.

#### Now that's entertainment

The Dali Zensor 1 standmounters, two pairs of which provide front and surround channels, are former Award-winners in their own right. Paired with an expressive Vokal centre speaker and the articulate E-9F subwoofer, it's the most entertaining sound this money can buy.

Dynamically, these speakers are thrilling, shifting from bellow to whisper with precision, but they are as articulate as they are expressive and demonstrate great attention to detail. Dialogue is focused and insightful, delivering emotion with no heavy-handedness, and there is a staggering amount of subtle texture. The nuances add a level of sophistication further reaching than a simply adventurous or enthusiastic listen – a quality of sound that will span even the most eclectic of DVD collections.

The sub's front-firing drive unit is made from aluminium, but the rest of the speakers

comprise of the same 25mm soft-dome tweeter and 13cm wood-fibre mid/bass driver, helping deliver a

beautifully integrated performance. Sound effects that travel across the room maintain a consistency of character and the surround experience is entirely immersive.

#### Great for two-channel music as well

We mentioned the Zensor 1 standmounters were previous Award winners, so you can expect that same level of expression and detail when playing music in stereo. With balance and expressiveness like this, there is little reason to spend money on an entirely different setup for your hi-fi system.

That the Zensor 1 5.1 is still dominating this area of the market after three years is an impressive feat, a longevity signifying the only real kind of satisfaction guarantee. Unless a rabbit is pulled from a hat, we'll be here next year saying the same thing once more.



*Dynamically, these **Dali Zensors** speakers are thrilling, shifting from bellow to whisper with precision, but they are as articulate as they are expressive*

## Best traditional package £2000+

### KEF R100 5.1 £2850

**Sat imperiously upon** its throne, the KEF still rules supreme over the land of £2000+ traditional speaker packages. Made up of two pairs of R100 standmounts, an R200 centre speaker and R400b subwoofer, the R100 5.1 combines phenomenally well.

#### Incredible integration

The crux of its beauty lies in KEF's hallmark Uni-Q drivers in each of the R100 standmounters – a 25mm aluminium-dome tweeter at the centre of a 13cm aluminium alloy mid/bass driver. The Uni-Q delivers more consistent dispersion than traditional layouts and helps overall driver integration.

The centre speaker has the Uni-Q tweeter/driver flanked by twin 13cm bass drivers, and the sub has two side-firing 23cm drivers fed by twin 250W Class D amps.

*The scale of this package is enormous – the tweeter's vented design helps deliver a wide and unified soundfield which belies the **R100 5.1's** compact size*

Coated in high-gloss piano white or black, rosewood or walnut veneers, the cabinets look suave – the magnetic grilles mean no need for unattractive fascia holes. And the aesthetic promise is also delivered in the sound.

Films feel fresh and exciting all over again. The scale of this package is huge – the tweeter's vented design helps deliver a wide and unified soundfield which belies the R100 5.1's compact size. The dynamics easily convey the shots and explosions of the most adrenaline-fuelled blockbuster with incredible integration across the whole package.

#### Rhythm and jive

Subtleties such as intonation in dialogue and background bustle are equally impressive. Play a concert Blu-ray, such as Stevie Wonder's *Live At Last*, and not only will you get the full atmosphere of the crowd from the surround channels, but also a stylish performance from the stage. It's full of rhythm and jive.

As with Dali's Zensor 1 5.1, netting a hat-trick of Awards tells

you about all you need know about the R100 5.1's worth. Three grand don't come for free, but this KEF package is worth every



## Best style package under £1000

### Tannoy HTS-101 XP **£600**

The Tannoy HTS-101's appearance in the Awards issue had become an annual routine you could set your watch by. For four years it ruled the roost as our favourite budget style package, but the time has come to hand the baton to its successor, the HTS-101 XP.

#### Extra helpings of detail

Tannoy has done more than simply add 'XP' to the name. The design has had a makeover, swapping the MDF cabinet's shiny glossy finish for a smarter,

brushed-look version. The paper-cone driver and titanium dome tweeter have gained a few millimetres too, to 10cm and 2cm respectively.

The subwoofer, despite being smaller than the one used before, doubles up on power output with a 200W amplifier driving its 20cm woofer and matching bass radiator.

#### An airtight soundfield

These Tannoy satellites produce a more-than-decent spread of sound, filling our large test room with relative ease when our amp is turned up to eleven. Even when the speakers are placed 3-4m apart (around a metre wider than is ideal), the soundfield is airtight, with no detectable gap.

In terms of sonic character, the HTS-101 XP doesn't stray from its heritage of fast, exciting and spacious sound. It simply adds extra helpings of detail and solidity to the mix. Play *Interstellar* and, in the scene

where Matt Damon tries to dock the spacecraft and flee, the package refuses to let the on-screen action override the audio experience. The score's dramatic pipe organs pound their way through the system with power, scale and dynamics that thoroughly exceed their size.

#### The best of its kind

You don't need to prick up your ears to hear the score's low level instruments underneath the main action; bells sparkle through the composition with clarity and texture. When the booming score dies down, the subtleties of the astronauts' breathing emerges through the eerie silence. The well-integrated sub is a tiny powerhouse, slipping good amounts of low-end brunt effortlessly and cohesively into the presentation. This is a fantastic package, practical as ever and simply the best of its kind.

*In terms of sonic character, the HTS-101 XP doesn't stray from its heritage of fast and spacious sound. It just adds extra helpings of detail and solidity to the mix*



## Best style package £1000+

### Bowers & Wilkins MT-50 **£1100**

By this time next year, Bowers & Wilkins's MT-50 will have enjoyed a fittingly presidential tenure, having taken charge of this area of the market in 2012.

The package, made up of five of the much-heralded M-1 satellite speakers and the ASW608 subwoofer, receives its fourth Award with our initial impressions very much unaltered. Even ahead of hearing what they can do, we like the tidiness: the satellites are designed to work best when close to or, even better, stuck to a wall, and you'd struggle to find a sub as compact that sounds this good.

#### Punching above its weight

It is often said to be the smallest who shout loudest, and that's not entirely untrue of the MT-50. You aren't going to get the soundstage or rumble of a much larger or pricier, traditional

setup, but the B&W is comfortable punching above its weight. There is all the detail, attack and deftness to deliver exhilaration in spades, whether that be in the explosive action of a spy movie or the panic-stricken score of your favourite slasher flick.

#### Agility and pace

There's solid weight here, more than the naked eye might suggest. Much of that is due to the satellites, revised when this package was released in 2012, reaching lower frequencies than they once did. It helps support voices, which are focused and expressive in dialogue, and, even without a subwoofer, it means you get a fairly full-ranged performance playing music in stereo.

The sub itself has detail, tonal agility and pace that help you almost forget the restrictions of its size. To put it in perspective, upgrading to B&W's MT-60D package, which includes the far

weightier PV 1D subwoofer, will set you back an extra £850 - far from being an inconsequential jump.

#### Emphasis on style

If you're aiming for style over tradition, we wouldn't recommend that you put your money anywhere else. Well balanced and expressive, with an impressive amount of punch and an emphasis on style... competitors ought to begin thinking about how to stop the MT-50 returning for another term.



*You won't get the soundstage or rumble of a much larger or pricier, traditional setup, but the B&W MT-50 is comfortable punching above its weight*



# Projectors

A 65in television not big enough? For the ultimate in big screen entertainment, you can't beat our Award-winning projectors



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best projector £1000-£2000

**Epson EH-TW7200 £1800**

**Another year, another** Product of the Year gong for Epson. This is the third time in as many years, and a second win for the EH-TW7200. Nothing we've seen this year has made us even think about questioning its dominance of this price bracket.

What strikes us most about the EH-TW7200 is just how effortless it is to get an astonishingly captivating picture. The ease of use, its swift set-up and its superb construction - everything about this mid-priced Epson projector says premium quality.

### Sky-high detail

A Blu-ray of *Jurassic World* shows off the Epson's talents perfectly. It's an exciting, dynamic picture. Epson claims a contrast ratio of 120,000:1 and 2000 lumens of brightness. We believe it.

The image is clean and bright, with sky-high levels of subtle detail. It's a masterfully balanced picture, one that brings out the green of Chris Pratt's eyes. Whites punch clear and stark; blacks reach stunning depths without compromising on detail. Motion is as smooth as it can be.

It's not just Blu-rays that look good. Even older DVDs such as *Return of the Jedi* look clean and full of detail, even with the drop in resolution. The heart-lurching scenes in *Gravity* are dramatic and engrossing in 3D. And the screen stays bright, even with the pair of supplied active-shutter glasses.

The Epson's hefty chassis could easily look cumbersome and ungainly, but the curved design and smooth, uncluttered white finish look rather elegant. It's beautifully made, and controls are neatly hidden away under flaps. It's well connected with twin HDMI, PC, component and composite inputs, and the backlit remote is intuitive to use.

### Flexible and speedy

The inclusion of vertical and horizontal lens-shift wheels makes positioning flexible and speedy. A quick twiddle with the manual zoom and focus controls, and the picture is sharp and centred in no time. We expect a lot from a £1800 projector, and the EH-TW7200 passes with flying colours. It's a brilliant, fuss-free performance. Just add a worthy speaker package and you have one hell of a classy home cinema system.

## Best projector under £1000

### BenQ W1080ST+ £850

Last year, BenQ delivered a projector for £1000 and won an Award for it. The BenQ W1080ST+ follows in its footsteps, only at the time of writing that price had gone down further. Either way, this is the best big-screen picture we've seen for under a grand this year.

The picture is bright, crisp and clear, although it's the subtlety of the colours that really impresses us. We're inclined to believe BenQ's claim of up to 1.07 billion colours on display. Hues are rich and impactful, but never cross that line into overblown territory.

#### Smooth and dynamic picture

Skin-tones are balanced and natural. Whites and highlights are brilliant without washing out, while blacks go deep without necessarily swallowing finer shadow detail. Stick on a Blu-ray of *Godzilla* and you can clearly see the

lush, deep-green foliage in the otherwise pitch-black forest scenes. Motion is smooth and flicker-free, and the 3D is decent too, with comfortable glasses and a picture almost as smooth, bright and dynamic as in 2D.

#### Flexible positions

DVD upscaling is just fine too - there's an inevitable drop in colour subtlety and a bit of extra fuzziness, but it's never frustrating or distracting.

The projector is compact and light enough to be moved around. Its short throw means you can place it closer to the screen than most rivals, so you could probably use a coffee table as a stand for impromptu viewings. There's plenty of adjustment to allow flexibility with placement.

The BenQ W1080ST+ offers excellent value for money, and is a great first step into the world of projectors. If you want a large, entertaining picture for your first home cinema room, you can't go wrong here.



*The **Ben Q W1080ST** is a great first step into the world of projectors. A large, entertaining picture for your home cinema room? You can't go wrong here*

## Best projector £2000+

### Sony VPL-HW55ES £2800

We like elegance, we like unfussy machines. We also like expensive projectors that perform so brilliantly they blow the competition away. In this case we're talking about the Sony VPL-HW55ES, which takes this Award for the second year running. There still isn't anything at this price that can beat this projector.

#### Absolutely absorbing

The design is pleasingly elegant, with a clean, glossy finish topping off the superb build quality. Connections are simple (one component and two HDMI inputs tucked away at the side), and the remote and menus are slick and intuitive. Set up is smooth and swift - the

lens-shift wheel is a little stubborn, but that's the only niggle on what is a classy bit of kit.

This impression is reinforced the moment we start watching the Sony's picture. It is not often that we are absolutely absorbed into watching a film without nitpicking at the picture quality, but this Sony nails it. It's a stunningly detailed and immensely enjoyable picture. Objects are crisply defined without looking overly sharp; it's bright, even with 3D films. Highlights shine, and inky black levels are intense yet textured.

The colour palette is expertly judged, taking on a remarkably realistic tone while packing lots of punch. The subtleties in shading and gradients give much more depth to any film,

whether it's the bright and colourful world of *Guardians Of The Galaxy* or the bleak, dusty tones of *Max Max: Fury Road* on Blu-ray. Skin-tones are the most realistic-looking we've seen.

Even the motion - slow pans and speedy CGI action scenes alike - is handled with such confidence and grace we have no issues when watching *Gravity* in 3D. It has an inviting depth, and you can adjust the brightness of the glasses if you find any instabilities creeping in.

#### Premium construction

The VPL-HW55ES is worth every penny of its £2800 price tag. The performance it delivers is genuinely cinematic, and the premium construction makes it all the more desirable as an object. When our only niggle is that the lens shift could operate more smoothly, well, we know we're on to a winner.



*It is not often we are absorbed into watching a film without nitpicking at the picture quality, but the **Sony VPL-HW55ES** projector absolutely nails it*



# Simply the Best



## Sendor D7

Among the finest speakers I've heard at any price  
*Sam Tellig, Stereophile Nov 2014*

Sendor's approach is the most radical I've seen, going where no hi-fi manufacturer has gone before. D7 is extremely capable and very neutral, but most importantly it puts the music first  
*Hi-Fi + Dec 2013*

If you're after a great all-round, affordable, high end loudspeaker, here it is  
*Hi-Fi Choice issue 370 2014*

D7 has an unmistakeable touch of magic. Easy to drive, genuinely efficient, undemanding of placement, fine stereo, extended powerful bass, upbeat and well-balanced, build and finish first rate. What more can one ask?  
*Hi-Fi Critic Sep 2013*

However it's been achieved, we can't help but marvel at the sound from the D7's. Sendor D7's set the standard for speakers at this price  
*What Hi-Fi Oct 2013*

Bass punch allied to tremendous mid band and treble insight makes for a winning combination  
*Hi-Fi World Jul 2014*



**NEW** Sendor A5R



Sendor A6R



Stereo speakers  
Best floorstander £1000+  
Sendor A6R

The A6Rs truly are a stunning achievement  
*What Hi-Fi Awards 2014*

Brilliant mini-monitor  
one of the very best ever  
*Hi-Fi Choice Yearbook 2014*

This is a remarkable little speaker  
*Hi-Fi + Sep 2015*

Outstanding  
*Hi-Fi World Oct 2015*



Sendor D1

# SPENDOR

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# Stereo amplifiers



Choose the right stereo amplifier and you could be giving your hi-fi system the instant performance boost you've been looking for

**PRODUCT** OF THE **YEAR**

## Best stereo amplifier £300-£700

**Cambridge CXA60 £500**

Through the early part of 2015 there was a gap in the market for a good £500 integrated stereo amplifier. Then along came the highly accomplished Cambridge CXA60. Part of Cambridge Audio's CX series, it boasts digital inputs, high-resolution audio support and a well-finished design that is certainly pleasing to the eye. Oh, and it sounds great too.

### A snappy, enjoyable sound - but subtle too

This integrated amp is immediately likeable. It's snappy, enthusiastic and puts musical enjoyment high on its list of priorities. That doesn't mean it leaves things like detail, dynamics or rhythmic precision trailing - the amplifier is capable of delivering subtle, accurate detail.

Play The White Stripes' *Seven Nation Army* and that iconic bassline has just the right amount of tautness to keep you hooked. It's a gripping, entertaining listen. Thankfully, the energetic performance doesn't stray into unruly, overzealous territory, with the Cambridge exercising control over dynamics and rhythms. Hans Zimmer's compositions for *Inception* are appropriately brooding, and the tension is maintained throughout.

This Cambridge amplifier is seamless in operation. The on-panel buttons click satisfyingly and respond instantly, as does the smooth volume dial, and the remote quickly becomes second nature in use.

There's a decent spread of connections, with four line-level inputs and two sets of speaker terminals on the back panel. Inside the box, there's a 24-bit/192kHz DAC that supports playback of high-res audio files across its two optical and single coaxial inputs. Those hoping for a USB input will have to look at the CXA80 (£750) instead, but the CXA60 can stream music from smartphones via Bluetooth, although you'll need a BT100 dongle, which will set you back an additional £70.

Here, then, is an Award-winner that delivers in every aspect. It looks smart and it has a decent spread of connections but, by far the most important, its enthusiastic, detailed and rhythmically cohesive performance is an absolute joy to listen to.

Last year's winner, the Arcam A19, has a more refined sound but is £150 more expensive (and doesn't have any digital inputs). At £500, the CXA60 offers a more exciting and more competitive package.



## Best stereo amplifier under £300

### Onkyo A-9010 £200

**It has been** a good year for anyone looking for an affordable stereo amplifier. The £300-£700 price band has welcomed the Cambridge Audio CXA60 (see p79), while this budget sector has received a much-needed boost in the shape of the Onkyo A-9010 – an awful lot of amplifier for not much money.

#### Bypass the DAC route

It's becoming the norm for budget amplifiers to have digital-to-analogue conversion built in, but that idea only has real value if the conversion modules fitted sound better than those used in the digital sources. In our experience that isn't always the case. What's more, the digital modules often adversely affect the performance

of the analogue circuits around them. That's possibly why Onkyo has decided to bypass the whole issue by not going down the DAC route with the A-9010, instead preferring to improve other aspects of the electronic design. And it's paid off.

We start off with *Mountain Sound* by Of Monsters and Men and are swept away by the amplifier's energetic presentation. It sounds cohesive and well balanced, delivering a sense of drive and attack well beyond what we would expect. Budget equipment can often sound thin or edgy in the treble, but the Onkyo simply sounds open and lively.

There's composure too – the amp keeps the multitude of instrumental strands in check even when the music becomes demanding.

Add the Onkyo's superb timing and strong dynamic expression and you have an amplifier that makes listening to music fun. That's a rare quality at any price.

The A-9010 is happy across musical genres. It has enough refinement and insight to deliver John Williams' *Hymn To The Fallen* (from the *Saving Private Ryan* OST) convincingly. A decent amount of scale is on show here, but it's the way the amplifier deals with dynamic shifts that impresses us most. There's a pleasing freedom to the way it hits peaks – and a surprising solidity too.

#### Top of the class

The A-9010's breadth of ability means you don't need to stick with similarly priced partnering kit. It's quite happy driving the £500 Q Acoustics 3050 floorstanders, for instance.

The Onkyo brand is lately best known for its AV amps, but this stereo product has gone straight to the top of its class. Rival manufacturers should take note.

*Composure, timing and strong dynamic expression mean the Onkyo A-9010 is an amplifier that makes listening to music fun. That's a rare quality at any price*



## Best stereo amplifier £700-£1000

### Rega Elex-R £900

**On first impressions,** Rega's amplifiers do little to excite or inspire. Nothing much in the way of design to get the pulses racing. However, once you get one hooked up to your system, you'll be surprised. To the ears they're an aesthetic delight. That's why they once again dominate the upper price brackets of this category.

#### Number-crunching duties

Taking the basics of the company's £480 Brio-R and incorporating elements from the impressive Elicit-R (£1600, see opposite), Rega has created one of the most talented sub-£1000 amplifiers we've heard.

There are no digital inputs – we suspect Rega will direct you towards its accomplished DAC for those all-important number-crunching duties.

Instead, you get a good quality moving-magnet phono stage, one that's good enough to

make the most of £1000 turntable packages such as Rega's own RP6. And the quality doesn't end with the phono stage either. It might look functional rather than elegant, but the Elex-R is solidly built and well finished, and feels every penny of its asking price.

#### Won't make the floor shake

Anyone familiar with Rega's current amplifier range will recognise the Elex-R's sonic character. It delivers a fast, agile sound that's as rhythmically surefooted as we've heard at this price. Play a piece of music such as alt-J's *Breezeblocks* and the Rega is right at home.

It's happy to deliver that thickly layered bassline with power, and has no trouble rendering the dynamic shifts and changes of pace in the music with enthusiasm.

There's an addictive sense of liveliness and energy, something rivals tend to tone down in the search for

greater refinement. Switching to Tchaikovsky's *Marché Slave Op.31* shows that this amplifier can keep track of complex

instrumental arrangements and deliver scale with authority. We're pleased with the resolution on offer too.

Tonally the Rega edges towards leanness, but if you avoid sources and speakers that lean too far towards brightness all will be fine.

Of course, a power output of around 70W-per-channel isn't enough to make the floor shake in really large rooms, but we think this Rega is capable of decent levels in most set-ups.

#### Nothing better

Of all the Rega's rivals in this price bracket, Naim's Nait 5si probably runs it closest. It's a supremely capable powerhouse of an amplifier, but even that can't better the Elex-R's combination of agility, rhythm and articulation.

If you have the budget for a sub-£1000 amplifier, we can't think of anything better.

*The Rega Elex-R has an addictive sense of liveliness and energy, something rivals tend to tone down in the search for greater refinement*



## Best stereo amplifier £1000+

### Rega Elicit-R £1600

**Let's put this** particular Award-winner into perspective. Rega's Elicit-R is the best-value premium integrated amplifier we know. It takes the considerable strengths of the impressive Elex-R and builds on them strongly, fully justifying the extra outlay.

#### Immensely surefooted

The company's trademark attention to detail is in evidence here in both the build quality and the finish - characteristics that, together with the comprehensive, well-constructed remote control, help to create what we think is a truly top-class amplifier.

All our winners deliver excellent performance, but the Elicit's most impressive talent is its rhythmic ability. It has an immensely surefooted way with musical timing that can't help but grab the listener's attention.

Play Kate Bush's *Watching You Without Me* and the instruments hit with impeccable precision, keeping the complicated arrangement cohesive and musically interesting.

The Elicit-R manages to dig up incredible amounts of subtle detail - drums hit with realistic impact and tautness, while it handles Clint Mansell's delicate ambient soundtrack for *Moon* with pleasing cohesion.

Dynamic expression is impressive too. A power output of 105W per channel may be unremarkable at this level but the Elicit-R puts its watts to good effect, delivering the dynamic swings of the *Inception* OST with real venom.

#### Lean, revealing sound

Some might find the Elicit-R, like other amps in the Rega range, has a slight leanness to its overall sound and a hint of brightness to the treble. One or two rivals certainly have a warmer and smoother balance, but take care with system-matching and it shouldn't be an issue.

The payback for the slight lack of richness is a revealing character that won't hide flaws in recordings or partnering equipment. But we can't think of a rival that gives better insight into whatever you're listening to. In fact, we can't think of a better all-round buy for the money.



*The **Rega Elicit-R's** most impressive talent is rhythmical ability. It has a surefooted way with timing that can't help but grab the listener's attention*

## Boost your system with an amplifier

**Your amplifier** is the engine of your system: it accepts the signal from a source (CD player, record player, streamer, whatever) and boosts it to a level sufficient to drive speakers.

Additionally, it allows you to regulate the volume you listen at. When several sources are connected, you will, of course, want to switch between them - an amplifier will let you do that.

#### Influencing the sound

Some amps incorporate tone controls, allowing you to influence the sound you hear. Audio purists frown on such interference, but for many listeners it's a must-have option.

Opinion is similarly divided on the subject of remote controls: the circuitry needed by the remote might impact on the amplifier's sound, but you can't deny that controlling the volume from your sofa is a convenient bonus.

#### With great power...

How powerful an amplifier do you need? While it is true that more watts will give greater authority and the ability to drive a range of speakers, don't attach too much importance to the figure.

Modern speakers are relatively efficient, so it's better to have a quality amp with a modest output than a brute more about features than good sound.



**The engine of your system, an amp also allows you to influence the sounds you hear**



*An amplifier is the engine of your system. It accepts signals from a source and boosts it to a sufficient level to drive speakers. But how powerful an amp do you need?*

**Opinion is divided on the remote. It's easy, but might impact on the amplifier's sound**



# ESSENTIAL II DIGITAL



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# On-ear headphones

Portable, folding, wireless or wired – with a greater choice than ever, the right pair of on-ear headphones is out there for you



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best portable on-ears under £100

**AKG Y50 £50**

**Too often, budget** headphones prioritise style over substance. Once in a blue moon, it's the other way round. To get both in a great-value package that puts the emphasis on portability and exceptional build is rare, but evidently not beyond the AKG Y50s' remit. That's why they claimed Product of the Year in 2014 and, having shed £30 since, how they keep their prestigious title a second year running.

### Punchy expression

Our adoration for their boldly branded finish in yellow, teal or red hasn't wilted over the months (those looking for more discreet lookers can opt for black instead). Their glossy aluminium ear cups, each housing 40mm drivers, feel smooth, and everything from the durable headband to the firm-sitting ear pads is adequately cushioned for your comfort.

Though a step-up in size over many headphones in AKG's on-ear line-up, the cups collapse inwards enough to cram the whole lot into a coat pocket, manbag or handbag. The typical in-line remote for hands-free calling is present and correct, too.

We routinely grab the Y50s from the shelf for testing and it's never a decision we regret. Sounding as cheerful as they look, they handle Mark Ronson's *Uptown Funk* with the rhythmic precision and punchy expression to capture the track's irresistible toe-tapping musicality.

### Transparent cans

The soundstage's openness gives the eccentric mix of drums, synthesizers and horns enough space to work in, and everything inside is delivered with strict balance and class-leading dynamics. The bubbly vocals take centre stage with clarity and expression, while the bassy 'do do' hook lays bare the Y50s' deep, tuneful low-end.

We'd even go as far as to say these are the most transparent cans we've heard for the money; even the track's subtler sounds (sporadic guitar pangs and cymbals) manage to peep through the denser moments.

Writing off these stylish AKGs as anything but performance-focused headphones would be criminally underplaying their talent. And denying them a well-earned audition would be an opportunity squandered.



## Best portable on-ears £100-£200

### Philips Fidelio M1Mk2 £135

**It's not only** another successful title defence as we move up to three-figure territory, but another eyebrow-raising price-drop too (this time of £45). Having dethroned their predecessors last year, these mighty second-gen Fidelios are far from second-class.

Made mostly of metal and leather, a particularly impressive choice of materials given their new price, they scream quality. The snug, well-isolating memory-foam earpads are worth highlighting and the low-key finish is discreetly stylish in white, all-black or (as pictured) black with subtly fun orange details.

#### Plenty of punch

There's no hiding the Philips' sense of fun in the sound department, though. It's an entertaining

presentation: lively with plenty of punch and strong dynamics. There's warmth, enough refinement not to tire you, and a good sense of organisation and accuracy that mean they never sound confused.

Factor in the abundance of detail you get from top to bottom, and these discounted cans are very hard to top.

*There's no hiding the **Philips Fidelios'** sense of fun in the sound department. It's an entertaining presentation with punch and strong dynamics*



## Best portable on-ears £200-£300

### Sennheiser Momentum 2.0 £270



**Sennheiser was forced** to take an unexpected break from the on-ear Awards category last year when Beyerdynamic ousted its Momentums at this price. Sennheiser responded with the Momentum 2.0s.

But rather than going back to the drawing board, it simply added extra portability by allowing the (now slightly bigger) earcups to fold and by improving the quality of the sound.

#### Sonic character

And it's worked. While the sonic character is unmistakably 'Momentum', they dig up greater detail and appear more confident, stopping and starting with greater precision.

Timing is spot-on and there's a great balance

of energy and finesse that keeps you listening. Dynamics are fluid and there's a subtlety and natural sense of cohesion that welcomes anything from Drake to Bach with open arms.

Back to winning ways, Sennheiser has managed to successfully build on everything we loved about the originals. Make these premium portable headphones your own and it won't take long to realise you've struck gold.

*The **Momentum 2.0s'** timing is spot-on and there's a great balance of energy and finesse*

## Best home on-ears under £150

### AKG K550 £100

**Giant in size**, humongous in value. That was our first take on the K550s when they first scooped an Award at £250 four years ago. Having more than halved in price since, they remain the most covetable in their field - if home listening is your prerogative, you understand. The enveloping coaster-size ear-cups and chunky headband are better for

*Airy and spacious, the **AKG K550s** handle tempos in a natural, unforced manner and deliver the drive and dynamics to make music sound rousing*

wearing while sinking into your favourite armchair than out among the judgmental public. Looks and build more than surpass their reduced price, and so does performance.

#### Rousing sound

Airy and spacious in a way that's beyond the majority of closed-back designs, the K550s are sweetly communicative, handle tempos in a natural, unforced manner and deliver the drive and dynamics to make music sound rousing. Well-defined and expertly balanced, they chase after every last detail to the song's finish line and separate individual threads of the recording without sacrificing a sense of cohesion. Yet again, we're hard-pressed to find a better bargain buy for your home sessions.



## Best home on-ears £150-£300

### Grado SR325e **£270**

**These leaky open-back** headphones should come with an electronic tag - unless you're deliberately looking to peeve your fellow bus passengers, keep these Grados housebound.

Serious hi-fi listening is what they're designed for anyway. Their wonderfully open, transparent and melodious manner make longer listens a true delight, and they are equally good across a range of music genres too.

#### Not much swagger

As musical and dynamic as they come, the Grado SR 325s burst into life with Prince's *Purple Rain* album, sniffing out every morsel of its rhythmic energy in a heartbeat, with the strict organisation and analytical edge to keep them levelheaded.

Build is hardy, yet flexible, and while the foam ear pads hang over, rather than hug, your ears they never feel loose-fitting. It's a firm tick in the box for comfort, even if their Cyberman 'ear bits' won't give you much swagger.

Not the head-turners you might expect for £270, perhaps, but certainly the performance twice over. And that's what counts.

*A firm tick in the box marked comfort for the **Grado SR 325e**. Not the head-turners you might expect for £270, but certainly the performance twice over*



## Best home on-ears £300+

### Shure SRH1540 **£400**



**Resisting the urge** to mount these Shures on your head as soon as you clap eyes on them is like walking past a £5 note on the floor without picking it up. Their thick, super-soft Alcantara ear pads, comfortably enveloping and roomy inside, are the perfect company to carry you through album after album. However, they're perhaps not as suitable for on the bus, as they're a bit big (albeit surprisingly light) to call them the ideal travel companions

#### Swiss-style neutrality

Like their physical make-up, their sound is easy on the ears, serving up a broad spread and a balance of Swiss-style neutrality. A real treat to listen to, they handle rhythmic shifts effortlessly

and dynamics with every ounce of subtlety. Fast and agile through the frequencies, and naturally musical, they seem born to take on Basement Jaxx's *Do Your Thing*; the beat is enthusiastic, the jazzy piano textured and cymbals have zing.

Comfort and quality personified, these Shures are nigh-on irresistible and, £70 cheaper than last year, grab the gong again without breaking into a sweat.

*Comfort and quality personified, these **Shure SRH1540s** are nigh-on irresistible*

## Best noise-cancelling on-ears under £250

### AKG N60 NC **£230**

**For five years**, Bose has held this spot with its QuietComfort line. If you'd asked us what manner of sorcery could prevent a sixth straight win, we may have guessed AKG could have something to do with it.

And, as predicted, AKG's latest sound-blockers have indeed come up trumps. Flick the switch on the N60 NC's left ear-cup and you

almost get the Bose's eerie level of silence, reducing office and train noise to a mild hum.

They leave you alone with a sound that's astonishingly clear, detailed and musical - more upfront and punchier than the Boses too. Mids find balance between solidity and expression, the low-end is agile, and the treble has clarity and bite.

#### Don't leave without them

Add precision and enthusiasm to that even tonality, and it's easy to see why these AKGs take the cake. A full charge should sheath you in silence for around 30 hours, and the lightweight and comfortable tiny collapsible ear-cups and leather-wrapped headband won't put you off. Putting them in the 'phone, keys, money' pile,

*The **AKG N60 NCs** leave you alone with a sound that's astonishingly clear, detailed and musical - the low-end is agile, the treble has clarity and bite*





## Best noise-cancelling on-ears £250+

### Sennheiser Momentum 2.0 Wireless £380

**Products that persuade** us to magic up another gong must be very special indeed. If you haven't guessed, these are essentially the Momentum 2.0s with noise-cancelling ability – and yes, Bluetooth too.

Still seem expensive? Then how about if you take into account that these no-compromise all-in-ones do everything really well.

*The noise-cancelling experience of the **Sennheisers** is one of the most effective we've had. Office noise is all but gone, and airplane noise is no more than a hum*

Their noise-cancelling experience is up there as one of the most effective and natural we've had: office noise is all but gone, and airplane noise is no more than a hum.

#### Star of the show

The signature Momentum sound doesn't lose any of its verve or excitement in shedding wires either, even if things are a tiny bit tighter with the cable. It's a rich, full-bodied performance with a surprising level of refinement and an instantly likeable enthusiastic, up-front manner.

The low-end is weighty and detailed and the treble well judged, but the midrange is the star of the show, uncovering stacks of fine detail with plenty of clarity to boot. Worth emptying out your wallet for? Without question.



## Best wireless on-ears under £250

### AKG Y50BT £150



**Doing exactly what** it says on the tin, these are the Y50s (Product of the Year) with Bluetooth. They don't let the AKG name down either, being equally commendable across audio performance, features and build quality. The sound is extraordinary by wireless standards, and is easily good enough to pass for wired.

#### Luxurious vibe

Bags of detail go hand in hand with remarkable clarity, and you never find yourself wanting for more texture or instrument separation.

Peppered with panache, the presentation is as entertaining as it is competent, its fine sense of rhythm and articulate dynamics ensuring there's never a dull moment in the 20-hour

battery life.

The wired sound trades a little power for refinement but, save for the ear-cups' built-in controls and slightly thicker frame, they share the Y50s' luxurious vibe with their favourable ratio of aluminium to plastic and foldable design. AKG has cut the cord while maintaining high quality. If you want to go wireless without breaking the bank, look no further.

*The **AKGs** are highly entertaining, a fine sense of rhythm ensuring there's never a dull moment*

## Best wireless on-ears £250+

### Bowers & Wilkins P5 Wireless £330

**There's a theme** developing here. B&W is yet another brand building on the success of its tried and tested models. Wireless versions of the excellent P5 S2, these share the same design philosophy: rounded rectangular ear-cups, soft sheep's leather and twisted aluminium.

An executive armchair for your ears, no less, they work a treat; pairing is easy, the button

*Even last year, the wireless headphone market couldn't quite deliver on sound quality, but these **B&W P5s** show that standards have taken a leap since*

commands are intuitive, and claimed battery life is an admirable 17 hours. Even as recently as last year the wireless headphone market couldn't quite deliver on sound quality, but the B&Ws show that standards have taken a leap since.

#### Stamp their authority

For one, the sound is clean, with barely a hint of the hiss we often get without wires. They retain much of the character and quality of their wired siblings, their bold, weighty presentation not afraid to stamp its authority with the aggressive riffs lathering Muse's *Psycho*.

A firm grip on rhythm ensures an eloquent delivery. Dynamics are wide-reaching yet subtle. If you want to cut loose, these present a great sound and gorgeous design. What's not to like?





# build a better music experience.

**The Cyrus philosophy** of hi-fi system design is based on the proven concept of a modular and upgradeable ownership path. A journey that can start with a single box and, over time, build into a state-of-the-art, multisource audiophile component array.

This approach has won us many awards - and even more friends. Owning a Cyrus system is more than just hi-fi, it is a lifetime investment.

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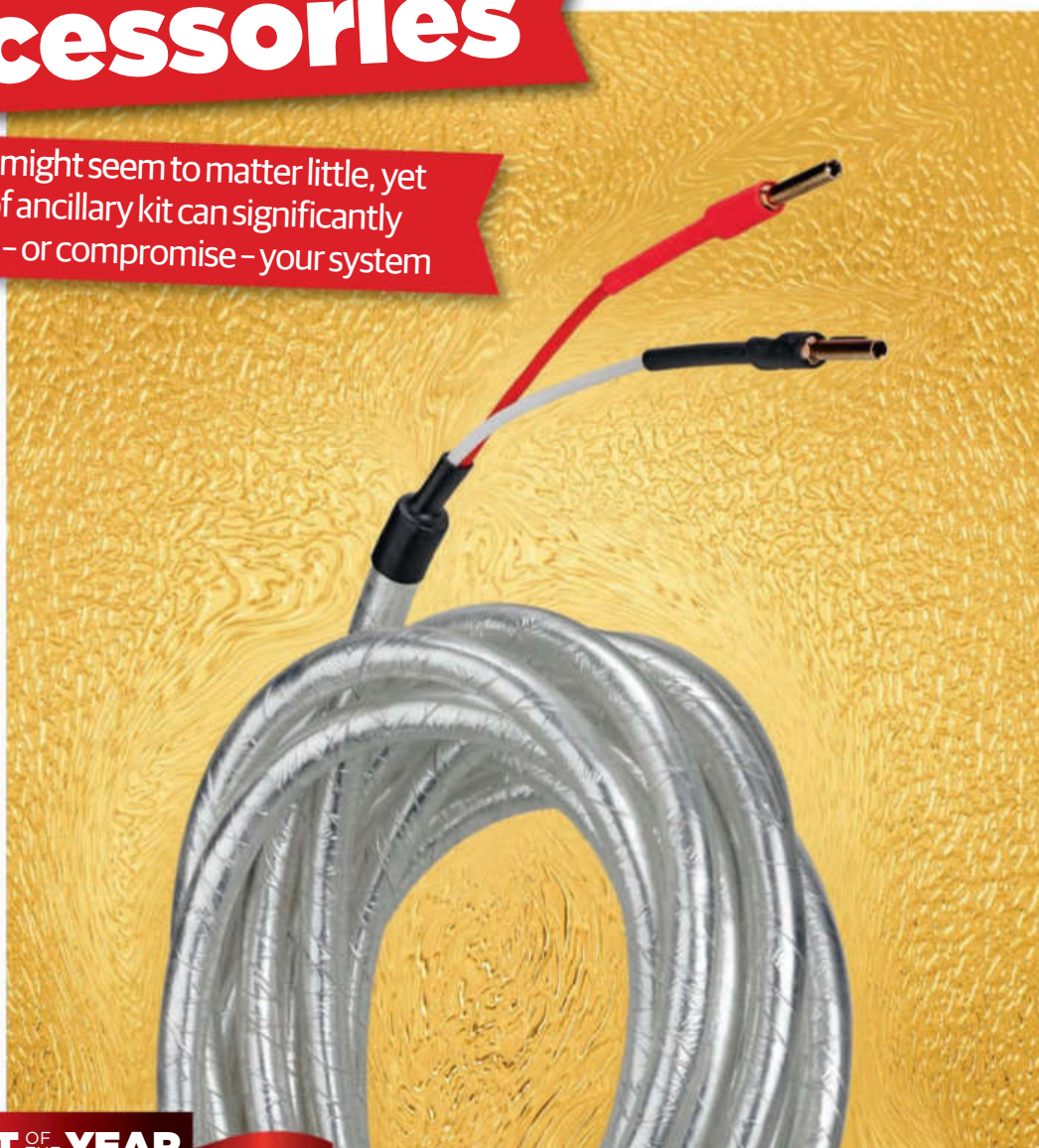
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Models shown: CD t, Stream XP<sub>2</sub> Qx, Mono X 300 Signature power amplifiers.



# Accessories

These extras might seem to matter little, yet your choice of ancillary kit can significantly complement – or compromise – your system



**PRODUCT** OF THE **YEAR**

## Best speaker cable

**Chord Clearway £10/m**

**Speaker cables** are like the kit-man of your hi-fi system: largely unheralded, but you'll soon know if you have a bad one. That's why the Chord Clearway is our Product of the Year.

That high-density foil beneath the transparent PVC jacket, resembling a kind of silver space snake, acts as a shield that Chord says is particularly effective at blocking harmful high-frequency interference. What it's protecting is a pair of stranded high-grade copper wire conductors, twisted together.

### A greater level of coherence

The effect of such a construction on our reference system makes for very interesting listening indeed. There's all the space, detail and attack you'd expect for £10/m, but what the Clearway does better than any of its competitors when plugged into our reference system – including last year's winner, the QED XT40, which, at the same price, we still love – is stitch the instruments together. Using the Chord, our music is more rhythmic, more dynamic, more musical.

The Clearway helps our system express the temper of Michel Ras's organ playing Dmitri Shostakovich's *Preludes and Fugues* as it does the melancholic poetry of Arab Strap, the ultra-cool shoegaze of My Bloody Valentine or The Beastie Boys' fidgety loops. Nothing is cleaned up, nothing is pushed forward; this is just the kind of transparency that will let your kit really sing.

This Award is a kind of 30th birthday present for a company that has made this sort of sound its signature. It has been pipped marginally in this category in recent years, but the Clearway delivers so much that it's hard to look past it and find anything as good this year.

### The price – and the quality – is right

Detail, space, frequency range – those things matter, and if the Clearway were lacking in those respects it wouldn't be given five stars. But what matters more is the knitting together and musicality, and that's where Chord has this right for the price. If you're investing your hard-earned in your hi-fi system, this is the kind of speaker cable it deserves.

## Best analogue interconnect

### Chord C-Line £45/m

**A second crown** for Chord in this category comes courtesy of the company's Tuned ARAY technology - previously reserved for its high-end kit. Combined with high-grade copper conductors and high-density foil shielding, it seems to make a great deal of difference.

Chord's offering helps our reference system focus on the detail and size of the soundstage of Lou Reed's *Transformer*, making sense of Reed's blasé delivery and unearthing the album's spirit.

This is an interconnect that knows what matters - the musicality of your system.



## Best phono stage

### Rega Fono MM Mk2 £200



**Even neckerchief-clad hipsters** with ironic facial hair need decent kit to play the New Order 12 inchers they've fished out in East London charity shops. That's where Rega comes in.

This year marks a hat trick for its Fono MM Mk2, and no wonder; power and punch is

coupled with great dynamics and rhythm, filling a sweeping soundstage with energy and expression. That kind of insight doesn't discriminate between sole vocalist, thumping club tune or traditional orchestra. Just plug in and play. Better sound from your vinyl awaits.

## Best speaker stand

### Atacama Moseco 6 £120

**Funny the difference** two metal poles and a bit of bamboo can make. Topped with a pair of B&W 685 S2 standmounts, the Moseco 6 defend their title in this category with aplomb. We get a sound full of detail and attack, yet musical and dynamic. Basslines are taut and textured, treble

soars and the midrange is rich and insightful. The increase in performance is tangible.

Atacama added the Moseco 7 to the range this year, for those after something a tad (10cm) taller, but we can't take the Award from what has become our favourite affordable speaker stand.



## Best equipment rack

### Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40 SE £525

**The Evoque Eco 60-40 SE** (Special Edition) improves upon its Award-winning predecessor so significantly that its effect on our system was evident within seconds. We found crisper detail, a tighter, more composed low end and better-organised instrumentation with whatever we played. And it cost only £25 extra per shelf.

Atacama has upgraded with longer legs, tuning counterweights for dampening and channels carved into the underside of each panel to disperse vibrations. We took apart the new and old 60-40s, creating hybrids to test the new legs and panels separately. Each time the Special Edition mods sounded better. Special indeed.



## Best Bluetooth receiver

### Arcam miniBlink £100

**It's a tenner** dearer than last year, but we can't find a Bluetooth receiver to rival the miniBlink.

Surprisingly superior to its competitors, which often sound harsh and bright, the miniBlink is smooth and fluid - especially so if your source is compatible with aptX Bluetooth. Dynamic shifts are explicit and exciting and rhythms are adhered to with dancing feet.

The design is refreshingly clean - just one button for Bluetooth pairing, a power port and 3.5mm output on a compact, pebble-like unit about the size of a computer mouse - and sound reproduction similarly so. The miniBlink reads from your source word-for-word, and that, with a product like this, is well worth celebrating.





# CD players & transports

Whether it's a CD transport or a stand-alone CD player, this highly competitive category sees the return of some established brands



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best CD player £500+ Cyrus CDi £1050

**Last year in** this category, Cyrus's response to being elbowed out of the Awards limelight in 2013 by Naim's brilliant CD5si was to introduce the CDi. And what a response it turned out to be.

### Impressive stability

The company's half-width design leaves the CDi looking like any of its siblings. But it doesn't take long to hear just how special this player is. We played Hans Zimmer's *Dream Is Collapsing* from the *Inception* soundtrack and were struck by the CDi's uniform, articulate and intuitive presentation. This might have something to do with the transport's much-vaunted ability to read the data off the disc correctly the first time rather than relying on error correction to fill in the gaps.

The CDi's other technical highlight is an advanced DAC section that uses a new 32-bit design. The aim, as always, is to improve resolution and dynamics while keeping noise and distortion as low as possible.

In true Cyrus tradition, this player puts detail resolution, agility and dynamic expression above all else. Take a listen to Stravinsky's *The Rite Of*

*Spring* and the CDi puts on an exhilarating show. The music's savage dynamics are delivered with breathtaking speed and punch, and the level of resolution is top-class. We know few players, even at double this price, that deliver as much detail. There's class-leading composure too, the player keeping a firm hold of low-level instruments even when the piece becomes demanding. This stability is deeply impressive.

True to the character of most Cyrus players, the CDi's presentation tends towards leanness, but if you avoid bright or aggressive partnering kit, the player's innate refinement is enough to avoid any issues.

### Enduring dominance

Around the back of the player are two pairs of single-ended analogue outputs and the traditional digital duo of optical and coaxial. There's also a connection for the unit's £500 outboard PSX-R power supply.

Cyrus's dominance endures - this continues to be the best player we have heard anywhere near this price, and for that it retains its Product of the Year title for another 12 months.

## Best CD player under £500

### Marantz CD6005 £280

**This isn't just** a hat-trick for the CD6005 - it's also the third time in a row this excellent player has won this Award. Staying power is one thing, but Marantz's domination here is little short of miraculous. What's more, it's available for the same price as it was last year - that's £70 less than in 2013.

#### Tailored balance

As with all of Marantz's best budget offerings, the CD6005 is a superbly judged product. It's beautifully built, with an aura of class that no rival we've come across can better. It comes down to sturdy casework, lovely finish and slick precision about the way the controls work. All this would count for nothing if the player didn't perform but, of course, it does.

The CD6005's sonic presentation marries refinement and drama superbly. There's an element of deliberate smoothing of rough edges here, which makes a lot of sense. Many budget amplifiers and speakers are prone to aggression and hardness, particularly in the treble, so the Marantz's tailored balance helps counter that.

Crucially, that civility doesn't go too far - any recording that should excite still does. And it's this understanding of the heart of the music that makes this player stand out. None of its



rivals offer such a strong sense of musicality nor balance refinement and richness so successfully.

#### Right at home

The CD6005 is a design with plenty of sonic stretch, which is good news for those who love to upgrade. It shines with similarly priced partnering equipment, the company's PM6005 being the obvious amplification partner, and we like what Dali's lively Zensor 3s do in this pairing.

But move up to the realms of Cambridge Audio's CXA60 with B&W's 685 S2s - both also Award winners - and the Marantz CD player is more than able to take the extra scrutiny. In such a set-up it sounds right at home.

A year on and there's still nothing at this price to better the Marantz. This is a player that will continue to shine long after you've upgraded the rest of your system. It's a pleasure to use and even better to listen to. Simply the best budget CD player on the market.

*Crucially, that civility doesn't go too far - any recording that should excite still does. Its understanding of the heart of the music makes this **CD6005** player stand out*

## Best CD transport under £500

### Cambridge CXC £300

**Wondering what the** difference between a CD player and a CD transport is? Well, a transport concentrates on the vital work of reading the information held on a compact disc without expending effort in turning that digital signal into an analogue output, as a CD player would.

#### Formidable pair

So what's the benefit? The theory goes that using separate pieces of stand-alone hi-fi kit to do individual jobs will almost always provide a superior sound. This, it seems, is the case with the Cambridge CXC.

After a couple of days' running in, we match the transport with the Award-winning Arcam irDac (£400) - and they make a formidable pair.

Listening to a CD of *The Dark Knight OST*, we are immediately impressed with the precision sound the pair provide. Crisp, precise treble is married to a snappy, well-defined bassline that really drives the music along.

There's a real musicality to the piece that can get lost on lesser players, with organic, fluid interplay between instruments. The sound we hear is almost as good as Naim's £995 CD5Si player, and puts the excellent Marantz CD6005 (see above) firmly in the shade with its more expressive presentation.

This is a nicely made piece of equipment too, its machined-metal chassis matching the rest of Cambridge's impressive CX range, including the CXN streamer and the CXA60 and CXA80

amplifiers. It's a quality build that looks and feels worth every penny of the £300 you'll pay for it.

#### Matching sound quality

At the rear are ports to connect the transport to other members of the CX family, and two digital outputs - one S/PDIF coaxial, and a Toslink optical digital. You can use this transport, then, with any DAC that you might already own.

Does that mean we'd take the Cambridge over the Marantz? Not necessarily. The two units are similarly priced, but the Cambridge CXC is useless without a DAC to marry to it. If, on the other hand, you already have a good DAC, we would not hesitate to recommend the Cambridge CXC over a standalone CD player. You'll have to spend a good deal more than £300 to match the sound quality it offers.

*If you already have a good DAC, we'd recommend the **Cambridge CXC**. You'll have to spend a good deal more than £300 to match the sound quality it offers*





## Best CD transport £500+

### Cyrus CD t £750

The **CD t** is the latest addition to Cyrus's long line of highly accomplished products, and it has gone straight to the top of its class. It's a CD transport, rather than a CD player, meaning it will simply read the data on the disc, requiring you to connect an external DAC to handle the digital-to-analogue conversion.

It's ideal for those who already have a hi-fi separates system and simply want to upgrade the CD source. All you'll need to complete the set is a DAC.

#### Astonishingly nimble

True to brand form, the Cyrus CD t delivers a fine performance that's difficult to criticise at its price. Matched with our reference Chord 2Qute DAC, GamuT amplifiers and ATC SCM50 speakers, the CD t demonstrates accuracy and musicality, demonstrating impressive speed and precision without ever sounding clinical.

Florence + The Machine's *You've Got The Love* sounds crystal clear, is astonishingly nimble and has a staggering amount of detail. The CD t breezes through the upbeat rhythm, with Florence Welch's soaring vocal sounding refined and smooth with no hint of undue edge.

The *Inception* soundtrack shows off just how nuanced and subtly dynamic the CD t is. It's not

just about the deep bass, but also about revealing the varied textures and layers of those rumbling bass notes.

If you've seen one Cyrus product, you've seen them all. The company's iconic (if dated) half-width, die-cast aluminium chassis design hasn't changed much in more than 20 years. But then, thankfully, neither has the fine build quality.

The remote control, on the other hand, feels modern and slick. Laden with more buttons than needed for the CD transport (presumably so it can be used across Cyrus's range of products), it is fast and intuitive, and has motion-sensitive backlighting. Be warned though, it tends to light up if it detects even the slightest movement.

#### Effortless musical listen

Connectivity is at a minimum. There are optical and coaxial digital outputs, but alongside the standard MC-BUS control connections (to connect to other Cyrus kit), that is it.

The Cyrus CD t is an exceptionally talented transport for the money. Yes, you'll need to add



a good stand-alone DAC, but the CD t is worth the extra trouble. As well as offering an effortless, musical listen, the level of transparency, clarity and insight is unrivalled at this price.

*The Inception soundtrack shows just how subtly dynamic the **CD t** is. It's not just about the deep bass, but also about textures and layers of those rumbling bass notes*

## How to buy a CD Player



**CD remains the** main music source for many, and disc replay will always be of paramount importance. Here are a few tips on buying the right player and getting the most from it.

#### The basics

CD players are pretty simple. They respond well to a decent equipment support and like to be placed on a level surface. The majority have digital outputs (1), so if you want to upgrade their performance (particularly for older players) an outboard DAC is an option.

If you already have a DAC in your system, then you don't need an integrated player. A dedicated transport, such as the Cyrus CD t, will do the job.

On most machines there's a choice of analogue outputs. Standard RCAs are the norm (3), but higher-end players may have a balanced XLR option

(2), which often sounds better. Ensure your amplifier can accept a balanced signal before you buy.

#### System matching

The arrival of CD took compatibility issues out of system matching, in an electrical sense at least. Turntables, or cartridges specifically, need a lot of pampering for optimum performance. CD players are

*CD players are pretty simple. The majority have digital outputs, so to upgrade their performance (particularly for older players) an outboard DAC is an option*

far less fussy. That doesn't mean you shouldn't take care in terms of sonic character, though.

Every bit of a system should pull in the same direction if you want optimal results. A fast, dynamic CD player is wasted if the partnering amplifier majors on a soft, smooth sound.

#### How to audition

Take along a variety of discs to the dealer demo. Make sure you try all sorts of music, and that the player copes with everything you throw at it.

If you have a lot of CD-Rs, make sure they work - there can often be incompatibilities between recorders and players, particularly with discs recorded on PC drives. Also, it's worth having a listen to how noisy the transport mechanism is. Some are loud enough to spoil quiet music.

# Revolution XT



## Revolution in design. Revolution in sound.

Revolution XT lives up to its name, marking a major leap forward in loudspeaker design and the realisation of some of Tannoy's most radical and forward thinking technologies.

Retaining the classic trapezoid shape from its multi award-winning predecessor, the new Revolution XT cabinets now feature an ingenious reflex-coupled dual-cavity design. This optimises performance of the all-new Omnimagnet™ Dual Concentric™ driver across extremely low to mid-bass frequencies. The complex internal design is further perfected with an integrated plinth that provides a uniform and predictable low frequency interface to the listening environment, delivering the deepest bass notes with ease.

Dynamic, engaging and articulate, yet incredibly easy to set-up and place in any room, Tannoy's Revolution XT is a true revolution in sound. Find out more at [tannoy.com](http://tannoy.com)

# TANNOY®

Tannoy Revolution XT6F



What Hi-Fi website March 2015

Tannoy Revolution XT6F



What Hi-Fi May 2015

Tannoy Revolution XT8F



What Hi-Fi July 2015



# Artera

“Lush, gorgeous – choose whatever adjectives you like: The Artera duet respects the music.”

Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News (November 2015)



**DSD**  
Direct Stream Digital



## Classics for the modern age

Artera is a new range of audio electronics from QUAD, fusing 79 years of sonic experience with cutting-edge technology and crisp, clean styling that both evokes the past and looks forward to the future.

The Artera Play is a CD player, DAC and preamp combined in a single elegant chassis. Incorporating state-of-the-art circuitry, its performance extends to ultra-high-resolution playback with an array of digital and analogue inputs. Its perfect partner is the Artera Stereo, a compact yet potent power amplifier delivering 140W per channel and sporting the latest iteration of QUAD's famous Current Dumping topology – the only amp design to have earned a Queen's Award for Technological Achievement.

Combining the assurance of tradition with the buzz of innovation, QUAD Artera is the lifeblood of high-performance audio entertainment for modern music lovers. Visit QUAD's new website at [quad-hifi.co.uk](http://quad-hifi.co.uk) to find out more.

QUAD Artera Play and Stereo pictured with QUAD S2 speakers



# Streaming services



Smart devices are everywhere, and the battle for their time is fierce. Which is why only the very best can win a streaming services Award

## Best video-on-demand service BBC iPlayer free

**There are those** who question the value for money offered by the BBC. Not us. We can't believe those people have taken into account just what they are getting for their £145.50 licence fee. Even without considering all the broadcast TV and radio on innumerable channels the corporation provides, we would happily argue that BBC iPlayer is worth the price of admission all on its own.

Missed the latest *Doctor Who* episode, or want to catch up with a week's worth of *MasterChef*? BBCiPlayer is your answer. It was already a great desktop service when first introduced to the UK public, and it's even more excellent in its incarnation as an app for your smart device.

### Swift, smooth and simple

The grid layout of the app is neat and stylish, with picture icons next to each programme, and scrolling through the app is a swift and smooth process. You can browse programmes by categories, schedules, Most Popular, Features, and also add shows to your Favourites list so new episodes are easy to access.

With increasingly high-quality screen resolutions on smart devices, both standard and high-definition programming looks fantastic. BBC HD content is crisp and detailed enough on smartphones, but it looks especially lavish and exciting on bigger tablet screens.

What's even more exciting is that you can download shows onto your smart device, where they're stored for 30 days. Then you can watch them offline at your convenience. This is great news for long train journeys, if you're out of the country or can't get any internet signal - it's the ultimate portable video app.

Have we mentioned it's completely free? We'll never complain about the license fee again...

## Best music streaming service Tidal from £10/month



**Tidal's main claim** to fame is its focus on streaming CD-quality lossless music for a £20/month subscription. It also promises big-name exclusives, HD video content and better royalty payments for artists. It has also introduced a more accessible £10 subscription tier for standard 320kbps AAC streams, taking the fight to the likes of Spotify and Deezer.

As well as a handy area to keep all your favourite albums, artists and playlists,

Tidal throws up plenty of chances for music discovery too, with curated playlists, new albums and songs on the home page, a tab of "similar artists" on every artist you search for and a Shazam-like audio search for naming songs you hear while out and about.

### Lossless streaming is the big selling point

We wholeheartedly recommend going the whole hog and signing up for Tidal HiFi if you can. It can't quite take its lossless rival Qobuz for subtlety and timing, but it's a much better interface, and all 25 million tracks are available in 16-bit/44.1kHz lossless FLAC, while some of Qobuz's are not.

The added sound quality does make a difference. Tracks streamed in lossless offer more detail, a better sense of space and a tighter handle on timing than their 320kbps counterparts, though there is a very occasional delay for buffering.

With an ever-expanding music catalogue, some interesting USPs and the choice of music quality, Tidal stands out as a truly compelling streaming proposition in an increasingly busy market.

## Best video subscription service Netflix from £6/month



**Netflix is a** perfect example of doing the right things well. It's one of the most satisfying streaming services we've used, fuss-free and easy to love.

The offering is simple and clear: Netflix is a subscription-only, streaming-only service, and you get unlimited access to films and TV shows for £6 per month. This allows you to stream to two devices at the same time. If you want to gain access to the increasing amount of 4K

content, and have the ability to stream to up to four devices, it's £9. Simple.

Where possible, Netflix gives 5.1 surround sound and video in 1080p resolution - that's Full HD, although Netflix calls it 'Super HD'.

### Some brilliant content that looks stunning

Netflix has a terrific selection of complete series of TV shows to gorge on, as well as a huge number of films to view. But it isn't simply supplying shows - it's now making some brilliant content too, such *House of Cards* and *Orange Is The New Black*. More and more content is starting to come out in Ultra HD 4K - and it looks simply stunning.

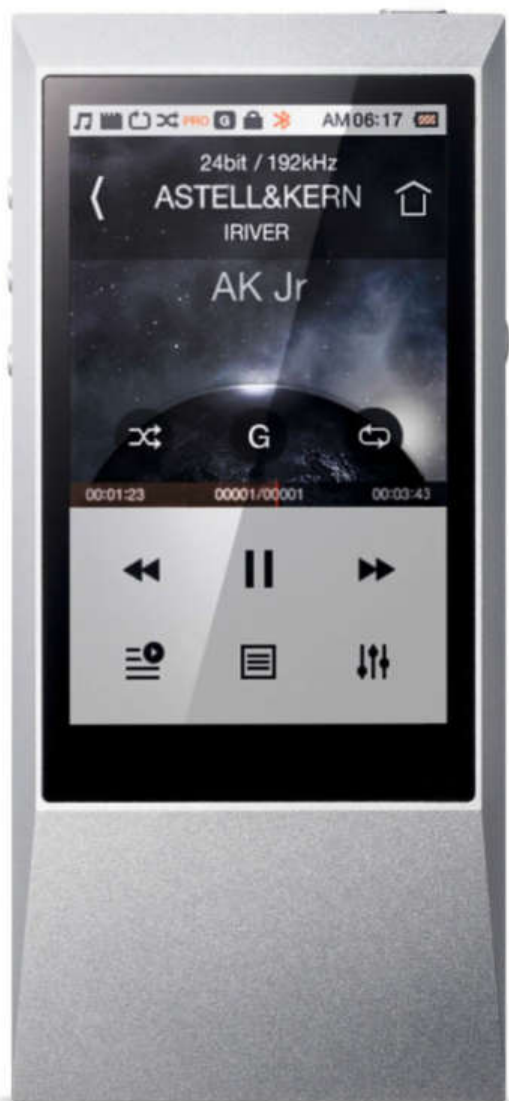
And Netflix is a joy to use. Across every device we've tested, the interface is simple and attractive. It's also practical: you can set up multiple user profiles, so video recommendations are catered for individually. Then there's the video quality, which is at the top end of what's available.

Even without 4K content, Netflix is a bargain. But if you've invested in a new 4K-capable TV, we'd suggest the video streaming capabilities offered by Netflix Ultra HD 4K for £9 a month is a deal that shouldn't be missed.





## Introducing the AK Jr. Because phones aren't so smart at music



### Want to hear more from your music and get the very best from your headphones?

Forget your phone: it's just not up to it. The Astell&Kern AK Jr delivers true hi-fi quality in a slimline player that will transform your portable music experience. From studio master-quality 24bit downloads to about every music format going, the AK Jr plays it in style. You can even use it to boost the quality of your computer's music output. If you want the best, don't reach for your phone – pocket an AK Jr.



3.1in colour touchscreen for easy control and clear cover art display



Aluminium casing and textured aluminium volume wheel



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**Astell&Kern®**



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"An audio treat. Just add headphones for the ultimate portable pleasure"

**What Hi-Fi,  
Five Star Review**

"This marks a turning point for high-res audio fans"  
**Stuff**

"This portable high-res number will redefine your listening habits"  
**T3**

"A smash hit because it delivers that A&K 192kHz/24-bit quality in a package smaller and lighter than an iPhone"  
**HiFi News**

"This company single-handedly taught the world that there is life beyond the iPod and iPhone for music on the go"  
**Ken Kessler,  
The Telegraph**

"The player will bring out the best in everything from 24-bit studio master tracks (downloads that sound better than CD) to Apple Store downloads."  
**Rob Waugh,  
The Mail on Sunday**

Available now from **amazon.co.uk** and all good audio retailers

# Wireless speakers

From budget-priced portables to top-end superstars, we've picked a winner in each of seven categories. Who needs wires anyway?



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best portable wireless speaker £100-£200

**Audio Pro Addon T3 £165**

**Lift it from** the box and the Audio Pro Addon T3 already feels like a product the quality of which belies its £165 tag.

It isn't a handbag-friendly bar like so many of its rivals, but that helps it feel like a more serious piece of kit, and it's still portable, with Bluetooth 4.0 streaming capabilities. It is robust rather than heavy, the handle is a canny touch and battery life is up to 30 hours at half volume or 12 playing at full blast. Its two tweeters and 9cm woofer are powered by a Class D amp.

### Bringing the Dead to life

When we play Bauhaus's *Bela Lugosi's Dead* we are immediately assured the T3 has the sound quality to match its build. In the unmistakable percussion with which the piece starts the sense of space and detailed texture are both immediately obvious, giving a more complex and natural feel than you may have imagined possible in this field. It is both bigger and subtler than any portable wireless speaker we've heard around this price. As the song grows, you notice not only the depth of the frequency range but also the lack of low-end dominance, and ample stability and depth.

The Addon T3 is ideal for background music in the garden or at the poolside, and its engaging, expressive sound will keep you listening for longer periods. This isn't going to replace your hi-fi system - but it is comfortable, communicative and, we'd go as far as to say, absorbing.

A traditional orchestra such as heard in Sergei Rachmaninov's *Concerto No2 in C Minor* is always going to lack its usual gravitas on any sub-£250 wireless speaker but, within those limits, the T3 is fulsome without sounding stretched. It makes instruments sound as wholesome as possible without sacrificing organisation or dynamic range.

We took our time enjoying the T3, equally impressed by the vulnerability it affords sparse, acoustic recordings, such as Ryan Adams's *Dear Chicago*, and the bounce it derives from a dub track like Prince Fatty and Horseman's take on *Insane In The Brain*.

Audio Pro provides everything you need on the go, including a USB port for charging your phone, and you might even fancy using the 3.5mm input for your record player or telly. Otherwise it's just balanced, entertaining sound - but sound that has changed our perspective on what £165 can buy.



## Best portable wireless speaker under £100

### Ultimate Ears Roll £90

If aliens arrived on a spaceship knitted by their gran, it would probably look a lot like the Ultimate Ears Roll. We doubt it would sound as good though.

Keeping up with the standards of its five-star family siblings, the Boom and Megaboom, the Roll is the baby among Ultimate Ears' impressive range of wireless speakers. The palm-sized disc is handily equipped with a stretchy bungee cord, allowing you to hang it from a peg, tree, friend etc. Alternatively, you can slip it behind the integrated hook to attach the Roll to your bike or backpack.

#### Functional simplicity

The design is simple – your only buttons are the ones for power and pairing on the rubber underside and the oversized volume control on top, while physical connections are kept to a microUSB charging port and 3.5mm input for hardwiring – but incredibly well thought out. Despite its size it's robust too, shockproof against knocks and drops, and waterproof up to 1m in depth for half an hour.

The sound, courtesy of two 19mm tweeters and a 5cm woofer, is much bigger – and better



– than you would expect from such a diminutive wireless speaker. Balance has been very well considered for a speaker that's likely to be used outside and on the go, putting midrange front and centre and slightly forward, with a clarity that allows vocals and high-mid range frequencies to punch through.

#### Fit for purpose

Treble is slightly clipped, but it remains crisp and doesn't harden up even when played at aggressively high volumes. It's another example of this speaker working splendidly well in fulfilling its purpose. Bass range is understandably limited (the Roll is less than 14cm in diameter) but it's solid and well handled, showing no distortion or boominess – a common side effect of speakers attempting to sound bigger than they are.

In all, this bright, bold and innovative incarnation of Ultimate Ears' musical vision is an exciting, rhythmic and surprisingly dynamic listen. Extra touches such as the Roll app, which lets you pair with another speaker to produce a bigger sound or play in stereo, offer scope to make this more than an on-the-go fix. And with an asking price that tucks modestly under a ton, the Roll just keeps ticking all the boxes.

*In all, this bright, bold and innovative incarnation of Ultimate Ears' musical vision is an exciting, rhythmic and surprisingly dynamic listen*

## Best portable wireless speaker £200+

### KEF Muo £300

The lineage between the KEF Muo and its ancestor the Muon isn't easily traceable, what with the latter being a towering, limited-edition 'flagship' pair of speakers costing £140,000, and their descendant being a £300 wireless brick.

That isn't to say the two products have nothing in common. There's Ross Lovegrove, the industrial designer whose aluminium, hourglass signature – this time a perforated grille rather than the shape of the whole chassis – is evident in both. KEF says the aluminium helps eliminate unwanted vibrations, but it also helps to deliver the same premium quality of build and aesthetic you'd expect further up the price range.

#### Putting the music first

The Muo isn't waterproof, making it more kitchen-top than rainy festival, but given that we're well beyond the £200 mark, you'd expect the focus to favour sound over portability. To that end, inside are two 5cm drivers – the diaphragm is a combination of dome and cone sections connected with a flexible membrane, an attempt at a simpler version of KEF's Uni-Q drivers – and a bass radiator.

Using Bluetooth here is easy, especially if you're connecting through NFC (near field

communication), and there's capability for Bluetooth 4.0 with aptX if you have a compatible source. (There's a 3.5mm input next to the microUSB charging port, if you'd rather hardwire.)

Treating the Muo to Reuben's post-hardcore epic *Return Of The Jedi*, the clarity and insight of its sound are immediately apparent. Even the opening seconds of octave guitar riff have the rhythm and dynamics to leave us anticipating the venom we're about to experience. As textures build and recede, the Muo has comfortably enough space and articulation to deliver the more chaotic moments with dexterity and juxtapose them against those more brooding, sombre passages. Likewise the expression in Jamie



Lenman's railing vocal: the lines between seething holler and near-whisper are clearly drawn and neatly tied together.

#### Eclectic and impartial

Those strengths are entirely transferable to any musical genre. We listen in turn to John Lee Hooker, 2manydjs and Frédéric Chopin and enjoy the same clarity, organisation and character with all of them. Of course, you can't ignore the Muo's size – you won't get oceanic depth when it comes to frequency range, or the soundstage of a live orchestra – but what the Muo does it does better than any other portable wireless speaker we've heard.

*As textures build and recede, the Muo has the space and articulation to deliver chaotic moments with dexterity and juxtapose them against more brooding passages*

## Best mains-powered wireless speaker under £200

### Monitor Audio Airstream S150 **£150**



**It's as if** Monitor Audio were in that hypothetical hot-air balloon, dropping toward the sea, deciding what it could lose from last year's Award-winning Airstream S200 wireless speaker. Only, rather than survival, its aim was to create an alternative at once cheaper and better-sounding. My, how it has succeeded.

#### What's the difference?

At first, it appears the Airstream S150 and its older sibling are identical. They are the same size and available in the same black or white finishes. The drive units and internal amplification haven't changed; there's a 20mm tweeter flanked by two 7.5cm woofers behind the fabric-covered grille, sitting on an angled baffle to aid sound dispersion. The volume and input selector buttons are in the same place and the LED on the front still shines cyan when

you're using Bluetooth and green when playing through the 3.5mm input.

So, where's that £50 saving? Well there's no longer any AirPlay or DLNA streaming, though Bluetooth is now the better-quality aptX, and the USB port is now purely for charging Android and iOS devices. Not an unreasonable compromise – especially if the sound is better.

And it is. It is more robust, more confident. The clarity and openness of the S200 isn't lost, but music is delivered with extra solidity and conviction. Play Rancid's *Red Hot Moon* and the drum kit punches and drives, dancing with palm-muted guitars and chirping organ. The S150 seems to give extra impetus to the song's infectious skank, never losing composure even at high volumes – you should have no trouble filling a small- to medium-sized room – and the sound becomes even fuller and more refined when using the 3.5mm jack.

*Music is delivered with solidity and conviction. Play Rancid's Red Hot Moon and the drums punch and drive, dancing with palm-muted guitars and chirping*

#### Acoustic sensibilities

Tone it right down with an acoustic track such as Sufjan Stevens's *Death With Dignity* and the S150 is clearly capable of great subtlety and agility as well, while letting the treble sing freely.

So there it is, cheaper and better-sounding. We'd be foolish to ask for any more.

## Best mains-powered wireless speaker £200–£600

### Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+ **£330**

**Nope, still nothing** to trump Geneva at this price point. This year marks the Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+'s third triumph, and its feet appear superglued to the perch.

There's nothing particularly fancy about the basics – this is a Bluetooth speaker, albeit one with a classily minimalist aesthetic, with a 3.5mm input and featuring a clock radio with DAB+ and FM tuners – but its sonic ability remains unmatched by any of its peers.

#### Unusual detail

Streaming The Twilight Sad's album *Nobody Wants To Be Here And Nobody Wants To Leave*, we are no less impressed by the Model S's level of detail and dynamics than when we first heard it two-and-a-bit years ago. The guitar line on *There's A Girl In The Corner* that opens the record is full of texture, and the reverse delay echoes in a generous amount of space. Drums thump, solid and taut, and there's substantial heft to the bass.

The expressiveness and rhythm precisely tracks the album's peaks and troughs, as it does the ubiquitous emotion in James Graham's vocal. There's enthusiasm and, when needed, great sympathy – the evident quality here quickly signals that we are now in the realm of



wireless speakers through which you could happily listen to full bodies of work.

We've never been coy about our appreciation of how the Model S renders those silences between the music, either. Try something such as Gang Of Four's stop-start *He'd Send The Army* and hear the distinction between those snare shots with elongated reverb and those that stop dead.

This is the kind of dynamic control that pushes the Geneva towards hi-fi-quality sound. Lower-resolution files will still sound great – the Model S is surprisingly forgiving of 160kbps tracks streamed via Spotify – but we think you're doing this speaker a bit of a disservice if you're not treating it to CD-ripped WAV files. (Using the 3.5mm auxiliary input adds even more solidity and focus.)

#### Persistent reign

The Model S still looks dead suave, propped up on its stand or just resting on its rubber feet, and the sound only becomes more impressive as the years go by. We somehow become less and less surprised that we haven't heard a worthy challenger. This is still the combination wireless speaker and clock radio we want to wake up next to each morning.

*The **Model S** still looks dead suave, propped up on its stand or just resting on its rubber feet, and the sound only becomes more impressive as the years go by*



# Flexson Desk Stand for the SONOS PLAY:1

Listen to the world from a different angle.



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## Best mains-powered wireless speaker £600-£800

### Geneva AeroSphère Large £650

If there were a *What Hi-Fi?* Award for softest product of the year, the AeroSphère Large would be bossing it. As there isn't (yet), Geneva will have to make do with domination of the mid- to high-end wireless speaker market.

Fundamentally, this globular gem is a cabinet of three acoustic chambers housing two 2.5m tweeters, a pair of 10cm woofers and an upfiring 15cm subwoofer, all powered by dedicated amplifiers. There's support for AirPlay, DLNA streaming and high-quality aptX Bluetooth, and a 3.5mm input - so you can fire it up with pretty much anything you use to play music. Then there are the extras, such as a stand (£150), the AeroSphère Base CD player and radio receiver (£450) and AeroSphère Small for hooking up multi-room (£350). These offer scope for a little upgrading and customisation.

#### Offset yet intertwined

But we adore the sound most. Play Ludovico Einaudi's *The Planets* and immediately you feel the warmth of those synthesizer notes, offset against the piano and yet splendidly intertwined thanks to the AeroSphère's rhythmic understanding of those tentative grace notes. The ample space in which the strings pedal underneath, and in which they are

dynamically left to push and pull, helps fill the soundscape without compromising the solitudinous atmosphere or nervousness of the piece.

The level of expression is outstanding, and transfers to whatever you play. Bombay Bicycle Club's *Luna*, for example, sounds emphatic. There's a boldness about the AeroSphère as rhythms shift between grooves, helped by a healthy quantity of bass weight, and a solidity that focuses Jack Steadman and Rae Morris's vocals in an otherwise wide-open soundscape. Even the most lo-fi recordings are vigorous, exciting. Take The Hives' *Barely Legal* album: as Howlin' Pelle Almqvist blusters through his lines with

*Immediately you feel the warmth of those synthesizer notes, offset against the piano and yet splendidly intertwined thanks to the AeroSphère's rhythmic skill*



unswerving vivacity, the AeroSphère doesn't miss one of the band's ADHD beats.

#### Substance as well as style

Our appreciation is upped by the fact so few wireless speakers have the sound to back up such a standout aesthetic. If we could afford it, we'd buy two: one for listening and one just to hold.

## Best mains-powered wireless speaker £800+

### Naim Mu-so £895



Naim moved the goalposts when it released the Mu-so last year and its competitors are no closer to finding them.

Being one of the first established hi-fi manufacturers to step into the wireless speaker world was a bold move, as was creating a system with such a hefty price tag. But, from its premium-quality design and build - the volume dial is so beautifully machined you'll likely use it more than the remote - to its support for nearly every streaming method, the Mu-so is still worth every penny Naim is asking.

#### Design borne of experience

Inside, six custom-designed drivers - two dome tweeters, two midrange and two 'racetrack' bass - are each powered by a 75W digital amplifier.

The DSP technology - a high-performance 32-bit silicon chip - has been developed from Naim's work on Bentley's in-car audio systems and the bass reflex port is ribbed and flared to minimise distortion. The result? The closest to hi-fi quality we've heard from a wireless speaker.

The power behind the Mu-so's sound is astonishing, driving all songs with a sure-footed

*Guitar chords, awash with delay, swell and disappear with grace. There is depth to John Martyn's whisper, which is allowed to be vulnerable but never meek*

sense of rhythm, rich detail and a depth and agility in the bass we've not heard in any other wireless speaker. It easily fills our large listening room with its soaring dynamics and the airy soundfield is as wide as it is tall and deep.

#### Natural sounds

John Martyn's *Small Hours* is set beautifully against its midnight backdrop of water and wildlife, and is given almost as much space as the countryside in which it was recorded. Guitar chords, awash with delay, swell and disappear with grace and the song's subtle heartbeat is sympathetic yet unyielding. There is depth to Martyn's whisper, which is allowed to be vulnerable but never meek.

There is no loss of detail or rhythm as you turn up the volume, as well you might with a track such as The Prodigy's *No Good (Start The Dance)*. There's no hardness or brightness as the Mu-so spits out the multi-faceted dancing beats with strict control over frequencies and timing. It might not power the liveliest of warehouse raves, but we are certainly listening to this piece with a party in mind.

There isn't really much to add: this is simply the finest sound we've ever heard delivered by a wireless all-in-one unit.



# Set-top boxes

With an ever-expanding choice of quality viewing on offer, you'll be wanting a similar level of quality from the box that delivers it all



**PRODUCT** OF THE **YEAR**

## Best subscription service

**Sky+ HD 2TB £250**

**Another year, another** win for Sky. Subscription packages may have lost some ground to software-only services such as Netflix, but Sky still rules the dish-or-cable-plus-box arena.

The latest box comes with built-in wi-fi, all the better for accessing Sky's on-demand content and TV catch-up services. The top-spec model has a 2TB hard disk - plenty of space for cramming in all those box sets you've not got around to watching.

### Enduring quality

Sky's offering hasn't changed much over the past couple of years, and we're totally fine with that. The hardware is as good as ever, and the software gets updated from time to time. The box costs £250, but there are package deals. Existing customers with the Family Bundle can get the box for £150. New customers can even get the box for free.

Your 2TB of storage is actually 1.5TB - the rest is taken up by the operating system and On Demand content. What is 1.5TB good for? Plenty: 350 hours of HD content or 1180 hours of standard definition. Go ahead

and download to your heart's content - it will be a while before you even need to consider deleting things to make space.

The interface is more intuitive than ever. The latest helpful additions include recommendations of TV shows and films based on your planner and recent recordings. The Planner has also been updated so your recent recordings and downloads are at the top of the first page. Handy. That's on top of a Catch Up section that offers BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, All4 (formerly 4OD) and Demand 5 - plus plenty more from Sky's own catch-up channels.

### The gift of sound and vision

As ever, the box also benefits from excellent picture and sound quality. The 1080i HD pictures are crisply defined and vibrantly coloured. The standard-definition picture is clean and stable. The sound - in 5.1 where compatible - does the job very nicely. Oh, and there's the Sky+ app.

Sky+ HD may not be new or revolutionary, but what it offers is a complete software and hardware subscription package that's hard to rival. And that's why it deserves yet another Award.

## Best PVR

**Humax DTR-T2000 £180**

**If there's one** thing we've learned about Humax over the years, it's that these people know a thing or two about what constitutes a great set-top box. Every new unit is a little better than before, refining a winning combination of reliable hardware and intuitive software.

Topping the Humax tree is the DTR-T2000, which was upgraded in 2014 in a way that has kept it at the top of its game. What's more, it can be had for less cash now.

### Even better than before

Those improvements really hit the spot. They made the Humax smaller, less conspicuous, and more attractive – it will look just fine alongside your existing kit. It's quieter and cooler too, thanks to an external power supply that makes noisy fans redundant.

Operationally? Button presses are responsive. Navigation is fast. Menus are zippy with lag times dramatically reduced. Gone are the days of pressing keys and waiting in frustration as the system catches up. Basically, this is the best way to add YouView to your TV viewing experience.

If you've not experienced YouView, you're in for a treat. It's basically Freeview on steroids: a free service that gives you access to more than 70 TV and radio channels, which you can pause,

rewind or record using the 500GB of storage.

There is also a 1TB model, yours for £230. The electronic guide lets you scroll back by seven days, and is tied to web-based catch-up services.

Missed something? Browse, pick something, and it will play on the appropriate catch-up app: BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, All4 and Demand 5. There's also Sky's Now TV, Sky Store, Milkshake!

*Those improvements really hit the spot. They made the **Humax** smaller, less conspicuous, and more attractive – it will look just fine alongside your existing kit*



(for kids), S4C (in Wales), STV (in Scotland) and UKTV (Dave, Really, Yesterday). Netflix and Now TV are recent additions.

### Detailed, defined and dextrous

Standard and HD picture quality is very good. What you get is a clean picture with plenty of detail, decent motion handling and strong definition. Twin tuners let you record one channel while watching another, or record two at the same time.

YouView is probably the best way to consume free-to-air television. And this box is probably the best way to use YouView. Want to spice up your television experience? This is the way to go.

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# Tablets

## Best tablet 8in+

### Apple iPad Air 2 from £400

When your predecessor is as good as the iPad Air 1 - last year's Tablet of the Year - of course it's going to be all about refinement rather than revolution, and the new tweaks and additions found on the Air 2 take the iPad closer to tablet perfection than ever before.

#### Real drive and dynamism

Its build quality is as good as ever, managing to be both slimmer and lighter than the iPad Air 1.

The TouchID fingerprint sensor has been added, distinguishable by the silver ring around the home button, plus the silencer switch has become an on-screen option in the Control Centre instead.

At the heart of the iPad Air 2 is Apple's brand new A8X processor, which promises a 40 per cent faster performance. It absolutely delivers. The iPad Air 1 was no slouch, but with the iPad Air 2 swipes feel that little bit more immediate, taps a touch more responsive. Play a game and the better performance is evident, with even the most graphic-intensive games superbly rendered.

There have been improvements to the screen too. While it remains the same 9.7in display with a pin-sharp 2048 x 1536, colour reproduction is better than ever.

It's subtle, but there's a slightly richer balance than before. Blacks are deeper, contrast is second to none and there's even a touch more sharpness. It's a superb video performance that its competitors just can't match.

As for audio, the Air 2 remains one of the best-sounding tablets out there. It's an exciting listen, crisp and precise, with real drive and dynamism behind every track. Vocals are direct and expressive, and there's plenty of punch and enthusiasm to its character. It's not high-res capable, but with a standard-res performance this good we can't say we miss it.

#### Combination of superlatives

The rear camera has been upped to 8MP, with more detail and better handling of exposure as a result, plus the front-facing camera now has a improved sensor to take in more light.

You won't notice it much in well-lit situations, naturally, but indoors at night there is noticeably less noise for a clearer picture.

Its unexpandable nature will frustrate some, but invest in the right storage for your needs (and we would suggest 64GB or above), and you'll never be disappointed by the iPad Air 2.

It offers stunning performance, an excellent screen and an unrivalled user experience, all wrapped up in a super-slim and premium design with an app selection that's impossible to beat. That's a combination of superlatives you simply won't apply anywhere else.

Convenient and versatile, the tablet can be at the centre of your hi-fi system

**There is no** getting away from it - Apple knows how to make a good tablet. And when it comes to creating the best tablet experience on the market, the iPad Air 2 delivers in every way.

It's still a superb device that more than holds its own against the competition. Even Apple must think so - it's the first year its 9.7in tablet hasn't been replaced by a new one.

## Best tablet under 8in

### Apple iPad mini 4 from £330

its predecessor. Add a premium metal finish and this is still the best looking small tablet on the market.

Under the hood, there's the 64-bit A8 processor and M8 co-processor, promising a speed boost and faster graphics. Everything feels a little bit slicker and more immediate.

#### More vibrant

There's been some work done on the screen too, which takes away the air gap between the Retina LCD and the glass screen. Apple has previously done this with the iPad Air 2, and the

result is similar - colours pop with more vibrancy, and contrast is superb, with deep blacks and bright, punchy whites. The new anti-reflective coating also makes the mini 4 a much better tablet for using outside too.

Its audio performance is as strong as ever. Apple's rich, well-organised character remains, with a great tonal balance, good detail levels and full-bodied attack. It might not handle

high-resolution music tracks, but still provides a better overall performance than many that do.

The mini 4's cameras, should they be a consideration, are better too, jumping from 5MP to 8MP on the main camera, while the front-facing snapper has been improved for better shots in low light. They also include features like 120fps slo-mo and time-lapse recording.

The iPad mini continues to dominate the smaller tablet market, and its fourth generation comes with even more tricks up its sleeve. Of course, the Android alternatives offer strong competition, but when it comes to the question of which small tablet offers the best experience, the answer is undoubtedly Apple flavoured.

*The design is familiar, but the iPad mini 4 is slimmer and lighter than its predecessor. Add a premium metal finish and this is still the best-looking small tablet on the market*



**Last year was** not a classic one for the iPad mini. Its third generation received five stars, but it was ultimately little more than an iPad mini 2 with a fingerprint scanner. But this year, Apple's smallest tablet has come out swinging.

The design might be familiar, but Apple has made the iPad mini 4 slimmer and lighter than



# Systems

From all-in-one hi-fi systems to streamers and micro-systems, we've chosen four of the best music systems your money can buy



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

## Best music system under £400

**Denon D-M40DAB £350**

**It may seem** remiss to hand such an Award to a system without network features or Bluetooth – especially when the rest of this category's winners fly the flag for cutting-edge technology. But this Denon redeems itself in more ways than one. Its predecessor, the D-M39DAB, won an Award last year, but sonic improvements and a series of revisions make the D-M40DAB something of a star. And a well-deserved Product of the Year.

### Neat layers

The thought Denon has put into improving an Award-winning product is clear, and it has paid off handsomely. Performance-wise, it is notably better than its predecessor. There's more detail up for grabs, most noticeably in the midrange and bass, better organisation, and more confidence and space in the treble. Play Steely Dan's *Dirty Work* through the CD player and the Denon's spacious presentation splits the tuneful clavinet-playing, soulful vocals and moseying guitar work into neat, distinguishable layers, keeping a close eye on the faint cymbal-tapping as it ties in with the rest of the composition.

Sax solos enjoy generous scale and texture, while the reliable beat kicks hard and true, finding good balance between weight, detail and attack. There is a subwoofer output, but we doubt you'll need it. Agile, hard-hitting dynamics take you by the throat, but its wistfully musical, sweet manner is the clincher where entertainment is concerned.

Those concerned with network streaming will be better off building a system around the Cambridge Audio Minx Xi or the Ruark R2 Mk3. But if you prefer your sources more traditional – radio, CDs or even a USB key – this all-in, brilliantly performing Denon is a no brainer. And if the upgrade bug bites in the future, more accomplished speakers such as Q Acoustics 3020s (£190) or Monitor Audio Bronze 2s (£250) will be right at home.

### Life in the system

The Denon D-M40DAB may cost £40 more than its predecessor, but that would have to be a fair bit more to put us off. The staple of its success is sound quality, the message it sends is that there's still life in the micro-system yet. If this is the kind of thing you want, don't hesitate.

## Best music system £400-£800

### Cambridge Audio Minx Xi £400

**The Minx Xi might** not have needed a price cut to defend its 2014 title, but at £400 (down from £600) it is a good opportunity for those looking for an entry-level network streamer but whose budget is a few fifties short of Naim territory.

Thanks to preloaded BBC iPlayer Radio, Pandora and Rhapsody, the Minx Xi puts thousands of internet radio stations at your fingertips. It can stream high-res files (up to 24bit/96kHz) from your smart device wirelessly over your home network or via aptX Bluetooth. If you prefer a wired route, there's a LAN socket and a generous spread of digital (USB, optical and coaxial) and analogue (RCA and 3.5mm) inputs to cater for laptops and CD players alike.

#### Power, drive - and easy to use

A legible display and responsive remote makes the Cambridge a breeze to use, although the

Stream Magic app makes quicker work of browsing music from a NAS drive.

There's a sense of power and drive that belies its modest 40W-per-channel amplifier as it tears through Rush's *The Spirit of Radio*. Its fine rhythmic drive makes the most of the track's erratic tempo, and there's plenty of authority and scale to launch a full-frontal attack on the iconic riff. That's balanced out with enough refinement to save the rough-and-ready recording from sounding messy. Expressive up top and down low, the Minx lathers everything from bass guitars to cymbals in texture.

You'll be hard-pushed to find a more affordable box that's this sonically transparent, and that's true across the connections board. Music sounds agile and articulate through its digital and analogue inputs, and even Bluetooth streams sound surprisingly informative.

The new price makes this neat compact, glossy box more of an alternative to the Denon than it was last year - just remember the extra budget for a quality pair of speakers the Minx deserves (page 112 should help you out) and you can't go wrong. For a system of its kind, it's utterly desirable and undeniably great value.



*You'll be hard-pushed to find a more sonically transparent box than the **Minx Xi**. Music sounds articulate and even Bluetooth streams sound informative*

## Best music system £800-£1500

### Naim UnitiQute 2 £1295

**It's a streaming** system that's won our hearts since its 2013 debut, and today is more desirable than ever - even if it has picked up an extra £100. That's not Naim being stingy and taking without giving back, though. This year, it's added more tools to the UnitiQute 2's Swiss Army knife of features: Spotify Connect, aptX Bluetooth and, most recently, Tidal.

#### Impeccable finish

It's not just an up-to-the-minute machine, but has top specs too. It doesn't stop at DAB/DAB+ and FM stations but opens you up to the cosmic world of internet radio via vTuner too. To boot, compatibility and connections are exhaustive.

Files (WAV and FLAC included) up to 24bit/192kHz can be streamed over wired or wireless network methods, or played via its pair of coaxial inputs and front-facing USB socket. There's dual optical inputs too, as well provision for a couple of analogue sources too courtesy of RCA inputs and single 3.5mm jack.

All this, and the 30W-per-channel amplifier derived from Naim's Nait 5i integrated amp, is all packed in a slim, half-width chassis that feels reassuringly hefty, looks impeccably finished, and deserves a firm pat on the back for its coherent, high-contrast OLED display. The n-stream control app was only available for Apple devices, but thankfully the new Naim one addresses Android users too.

Tremendously transparent and quick on its feet, the UnitiQute 2 delivers an open, agile and weighty presentation as we play Ennio Morricone's *Cinema Paradiso*.

The soundstage, as deep and wide as it is tall, is beautifully layered and coherent, sitting the two piano

melodies side-by-side without compromising their relationship. Clarinets slip naturally into place with limitless scale and dynamic breadth, while changes in tempo appear effortless.

#### Hauntingly emotive

The Naim lets the orchestration pace the delivery without sticking its oar in too much. Textbooks-worth of information is scattered generously within the frequency range, with every part given equal billing. Bass is taut and deep, while treble revels in sweet, clear highs. A quick spin of Kate Bush is proof enough that mids are just as transparent; her hauntingly emotive vocals are packed with enough nuance and texture to send shivers down your spine.

It's hard to ignore a performance and feature list this accomplished and even harder to say no to it. If you have the budget, dive in.



*Tremendously transparent and quick on its feet, the **Naim UnitiQute 2** delivers an open, agile and weighty presentation as we play *Cinema Paradiso**



## Best all-in-one system

### Ruark R2 Mk3 £400

In many ways, Ruark's latest (and third) all-in-one R2 system is the antithesis of Denon's classic microsystem, opting for network streaming over CD playback, going for built-in speakers rather than separate bookshelves.

So if vanguard features and space-efficient build is of the essence, this one-box Ruark has an impressive CV. Alongside FM, DAB and internet radio, the R2 features Spotify Connect for premium subscribers to the music service. DLNA affinity, too, means it will - once connected to the internet over its built-in wi-fi

- dig up music from any laptop or NAS box on the same network, and offline streaming via aptX Bluetooth provides another alternative to its pair of analogue inputs, 3.5mm jack and USB port, for playback and smartphone charging.

#### Rhythmic punch

Aesthetically, it's every inch a timeless classic. The wooden cabinet, steel front panel and OLED display straddle the line between modern and retro. The slim, palm-sized remote favours the former, but part of the system's charm is the unit's RotoDial, which you twirl to change volume, switch sources and scroll music library.

For a unit that could fit on your bedside table, this R2 whacks a decent amount of power out of two 9cm drivers, the soundstage astonishingly big and wide. The twin down-firing ports help to produce deep bass response, but the presentation doesn't get bogged down with it.

The talented midrange makes voices sound solid and intimate. The R2's rhythmic punch gives songs a great deal of attack, and engaging dynamics make them all the more captivating. Radio stations sound weighty and dynamic too, with voices clear and focused.

A recent software upgrade also magics up multi-room powers, letting you link two R2s together. A dedicated app is in the works, but for now Ruark recommends using third-party apps. Even without it, the R2 Mk3 is one of the best-sounding, most seamlessly integrated do-it-all we've come across.



*The **Ruark R2 Mk3s'** rhythmic punch gives songs a great deal of attack, and makes them all the more captivating. Radio stations sound weighty and dynamic too*

## Network tools

### What else will I need?

As digital media usage increases all the time, more and more people are embracing streaming for their hi-fi solutions. Our handy guide will tell you what equipment you will need before setting up a streaming system in your home.



#### Router

##### Netgear N600 £60

Every network needs a router. Netgear's N600 is dual band, so wireless 'g' and 'n' are available separately, keeping interference between the two to a minimum. In a basic system, you'll connect your NAS and your streamer to the router.



#### Ethernet switch

##### Netgear FS605 £15

Instead of hooking everything straight up to the router, many manufacturers suggest you plug your components into an Ethernet switch first. This way, you isolate the key audio components from any possible interference generated by your router.



#### Adapter kit

##### Netgear Powerline 500 £25

If your router is located far from the streamer and/or NAS device, consider a set of Powerline plugs. These turn your home mains circuit into an extension of your network. For the best sound, we always recommend a wired connection above wi-fi.



#### Network storage

##### Synology DS215j £140

This sophisticated box of tricks can hold a maximum of 16TB of storage - that's enough to hold thousands of music tracks. Just connect it to your home network and every media player on the same network will be able to access the music library.

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# Temptation Award

When across-the-board excellence is the name of the game, hi-fi can reach unexpected heights. Enter the highest of our high-flyers...

**PRODUCT** OF THE **YEAR**



## Best Temptation

**VPI Prime £3750**

**This is the** first time we're giving an Award for the most impressive of the Temptations products we've reviewed this year. It was a tough call, comparing different categories of components at vastly varied price points. In the end VPI's exceptional Prime won through.

Surprisingly for a high-end offering, that sub-four grand price includes the deck and partnering arm. All you have to do is add a suitably talented cartridge - in the case of the review sample, a Lyra Delos moving coil costing around £1000 - and off you go.

The build and finish of the Prime is excellent. Its curved chassis is made of MDF covered with textured vinyl and then reinforced with 11-gauge (around 3mm) thick steel plate. It has a lovely, well-engineered feel.

The arm is, unusually, a 3D-printed unit. It's a unipivot design, which may take a little time to get used to as it wobbles around the pivot point when handled - don't worry, it settles quickly once placed on the record.

This is a simple deck to set up and use. Take a little care with the adjustments and you'll end up with a performance that belies what is, by high-end standards, a highly aggressive price.

Play Radiohead's *In Rainbows* and the Prime shines. This is a wonderfully confident-sounding package, one that can organise with the best of them and maintain sonic composure even when faced with something as brutally challenging as the album's opener, *15 Step*.

Move to something larger scale in the form of Orff's *Carmina Burana* and you'll discover such recordings hold little fear for the Prime. It's controlled when things turn wild and digs up an awful lot of detail. The piece's dynamics - both small- and large-scale - come through unhindered and there's plenty of attack when needed (which is often). The stereo imaging is impressive too - it's wide, deep and populated with crisply focused instrumentation.

### The true value of top-end hi-fi

What we have here is a scale of engineering and sound that's hard to better for anywhere near this price. Sure, there's no lid, and you'll have to pay extra for a decent cartridge. But once you do, we think the Prime is good enough to remind you why you got into hi-fi in the first place.



**Audio 40**

**Analogue XLR 40**

**Digital (AES/EBU) XLR 40**

**Optical Quartz**

**Digital Audio 40**

**USB A-B**

**USB A-Micro B**

**HDMI**

**Subwoofer 40**

**Silver Anniversary XT**

**XT40**

**XT400**



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# Stereo speakers



Two's company, and – standmounter, floorstander or desktop – on the following pages it's very good company indeed

**PRODUCT** OF THE **YEAR**

## Best standmounter £400–£800

**Bowers and Wilkins 685 S2 £500**

**It's a mark** of just how highly we rate these B&W 685 S2s that they've managed to hold on to the Product of the Year title for the second year running. Not that they've had things easy. We've compared them with all sorts of new rivals from the likes of Monitor Audio, KEF, Focal and Martin Logan, but for us they continue to offer the best combination of performance and price of any speaker we've reviewed this year.

### Well chosen improvements

Take a good look at these boxes and it's clear B&W has put sound quality first. The tweeter assembly now has a protective mesh over it and the dome is reinforced with a metal ring to improve rigidity and damping. The tweeter is also decoupled from the front baffle with a gel ring to minimise any sonic degradation caused by vibrations from the mid/bass driver.

Elsewhere, the 16.5cm Kevlar mid/bass driver remains mostly the same. The bullet-shaped phase plug of the previous generation is replaced with a mushroom-shaped 'dust cap' aimed at reducing unwanted resonance and producing a smoother driver response in the upper frequencies. Build

quality is nice and solid, but it has to be said that the finish is on the plain side compared with some of the competition.

But how do they actually sound? In one word: brilliant. Right from the start, these B&W 685s burst to life with a solid, clear and agile sound. These are hugely talented speakers. Their sense of scale is massive, especially coming from reasonably compact standmounters. The soundstage is wide and deep, enveloping you in a richly detailed, subtly dynamic and cohesive performance, whether you're playing Kanye, the Unthanks or a Hans Zimmer soundtrack.

The deep and taut bass is particularly impressive. Play *Ball And Biscuit* from The White Stripes and the bass notes are so rich and powerful it's hard to believe they're coming from such a compact cabinet. Crank up the volume when playing A Perfect Circle's *Thirteenth Step* and there's a very real sense that these speakers are having fun along with you.

The 685 S2s are hugely entertaining. Their many talents will make you want to listen to your entire music collection. That's why they hold on to our top speaker Award for yet another year.

## Best standmounter under £200

### Q Acoustics 3020 **£190**

The success of the Q Acoustics brand has been astonishing. The company started in 2006 and from the very beginning has produced class-leading, sensibly priced speakers. Guess what? Here's yet another one.

The 3020's cabinet is made mainly of 15mm MDF panels but with a double layer 30mm top plate and similarly layered 24mm front baffle. This structure is then extensively braced in specific places to control resonances and help with stiffness. It all pays off in an enclosure that feels immensely solid and provides a good, rigid foundation for the drive units to work from.

#### New drive units

The company's work hasn't stopped there. Both drive units are new too, sporting improved diaphragms and, in the case of the tweeter, a refined motor system.

*Play Prokofiev's Romeo And Juliet and the 3020s excel. They deliver a wide, deep soundstage populated by nicely layered and precisely focused instruments*

These speakers are just as likely to find themselves partnering a little micro system such as Denon's D-M40 as they are in a hi-fi separates set-up, and so need to be relatively easy to drive and sonically forgiving. That's exactly what they are.

Their innate refinement means any harshness in the partnering electronics isn't emphasised. Equally, they aren't overly fussy about similar shortcomings in source material, so those who have stockpiles of low-bitrate MP3s can still get a decent level of enjoyment out of them. Yet give them a quality feed from, say, Marantz's CD6005 CD player and Onkyo's A9010 amplifier, and they'll reward like no other at the price.

Play Prokofiev's *Romeo And Juliet* and the 3020s excel. They deliver a wide, deep soundstage populated by nicely layered and precisely focused instruments. There's a surprising sense of authority here, and the kind of scale that most rivals simply can't match. We're impressed by the dynamics on offer, too.



Change gear to Bruce Springsteen's *Radio Nowhere* and the Qs show they can rock too. They charge along with this track, delivering plenty in the way of drive, dynamics and attack. There's a plentiful supply of energy in the piece and the 3020s communicate it with ease.

Fabulous value? Without a doubt. That's why the 3020s prove good enough to knock out class heavyweights such as Wharfedale's Diamond 220s to win our entry-level speaker Award.

## Best standmounter £200-£400

### Monitor Audio Bronze 2 **£280**



We wouldn't be surprised if these new Bronze 2s give you a strong sense of *déjà vu* - it's exactly what Monitor Audio intended. There's usually no reason to mess with a successful formula and the company hasn't. Instead, it's chosen the door marked 'Evolution' and introduced a whole raft of engineering changes that are enough to bag these speakers a Best Buy Award.

The big news is that both drive units are new. The 16.5cm mid/bass now has a dished cone

without the traditional hole in the centre. The lack of hole helps rigidity and gives better control of break-up at the top end of the driver's frequency range. The surround has been suitably redesigned to make the most of this change.

#### Tweeter tweaks

The trademark gold dome tweeter looks familiar, but there's now a new venting system that leaks air into a rear chamber. This arrangement prevents air

being compressed behind the dome, reducing distortion, improving dynamics and lowering unwanted mechanical resonances.

These beautifully built speakers are available in four neat, vinyl-wrap finishes: Black Oak, Walnut, Rosemah and White Ash.

We can't seem to get enough of Debussy's *Clair De Lune* at the moment, so that's where we start. It's a test these Monitor Audios sail through. They have delicacy (when required) and handle dynamics deftly. There's plenty of

insight here, from the way the trailing edges of the piano notes fade gracefully into silence, to an ability to track subtle pace changes. It's a spellbinding performance, quite out of keeping from what we normally hear at this level.

We give Of Monsters And Men's *King And Lionheart* a listen and are swept along by the energy of the music. There's plenty of attack here and a fine sense of drive. Rhythmically, these speakers have a good amount of precision, and communicate the momentum of the piece well. Their open and explicit midrange makes the most of expressive vocals too.

These speakers have a broad spread of talents. They dig deep in the bass, are tonally balanced and impressively detailed too. Add solid build and Monitor Audio's usual high standard of finish and there's much to applaud here. Another Bronze 2 - another class-leader.

*These Monitor Audios sail through, handling dynamics deftly. It's a spellbinding performance, quite out of keeping from what we normally hear at this level*



## Best standmounter £800-£1500

### ATC SCM11 £1200

**Yes, it's the** ATC SCM11s again. The regularity with which these standmounters scoop Awards is almost boring – until you have a listen and realise they are quite simply brilliant for the money. We recently ran a group test taking in all the strongest contenders at around £1000, and the SCM11s won through with surprising ease. If you're after the most informative and honest speakers at this price level we simply haven't heard better.

This second-generation model adds a well-built curved cabinet and brand-new in-house tweeter over their multiple Award-winning predecessors, and these changes have lifted their performance considerably.

#### Telling it as it is

The SCM11's sound is remarkably natural. Combine that with class-leading resolution and you get superb insight into records such as Van Morrison's *Moondance*. Vocals are given air and communicate plenty of emotion. The song's distinctive walking bassline is rendered with tautness and enthusiasm (helped, no doubt, by the sealed-box design) while dynamic shifts are delivered in a pleasingly expressive way.

Nothing we try wrong-foots these speakers, which remain composed no matter how hard we

push. We go from Atoms For Peace to Massive Attack, via a spot of Eminem: at every turn the ATCs demonstrate an extraordinary level of precision.

That precision extends to the focused stereo image as we switch to *Jupiter* from Holst's *The Planets* suite. With this material these ATCs make it easy to place the various parts of the orchestra on the wide-open soundstage.

The levels of composure and precision are impressive enough, but the trait we like most about the SCM11s is their class-leading transparency. Whatever we feed these speakers, the sound comes out uncoloured and uncorrupted.

*The trait we like the most about the **SCM11s** is their class-leading transparency. Whatever we feed the speakers, the sound comes out uncoloured and uncorrupted*



That makes them hugely versatile, and an easy listen. It's as easy to analyse everything about a song as it is to just sit back and enjoy it. That's a balance we like.

The SCM11s continue to set the standards at this price. Given a suitably talented system they bring music to life in a way no rival we've heard can match. They're worthy winners yet again.

## Best standmounter £1500+

### ATC SCM19 £2000



**What's better than** the SCM11s? To get a significant improvement we suggest the next stop should be their big brothers, the SCM19s.

These are essentially scaled-up versions of the 11s. The nicely made sealed-box cabinet of the 11s is increased in volume to 19 litres – ATC's model numbers refer to the internal volume of its speakers – and the mid/bass driver changes to the company's highly developed 15cm unit.

The big news isn't the mid/bass though. That honour belongs to the new tweeter. This 25mm soft dome is a higher-spec version of the unit used on the SCM11.

Given a day to settle, these standmounters turn in a great performance. We start off with a CD-rip of *Clair De Lune* from our reference Naim NDS/555PS streamer and are impressed by what we hear.

There's a clear sense of how large the recording venue is, the SCM19s picking up the subtle acoustic clues that allow us to perceive the size. Piano notes are delivered with solidity and finesse. We're struck by the resolution on

offer and the natural way these standmounters render the varying intensity of the keystrokes. These speakers really sound right at home here, delivering a presentation that's as convincing tonally as it is spellbinding dynamically.

Those dynamic skills come into even more focus when we play Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. These ATCs have no trouble delivering the piece's crescendos with power, even at very high volume levels. There's an impressive degree of composure here, the monitors refusing to compress or harden up even when pushed hard.

#### Rave to the rhythm

Moving onto Prince's *Love* (from 2006's *3121* set) shows that these boxes can party too. They deliver the song's relentless rhythmic momentum with enthusiasm. The bass kicks hard while the drum machines attack with determination. Prince's vocals are handled in a crisp and articulate manner, but also lack nothing in terms of body or natural warmth.

These ATCs are highly analytical but they never sound clinical or passionless. They're just transparent to the original recording and system electronics. If these things are your priorities there are few better-sounding alternatives anywhere near this price. Buy with confidence.

*These **ATCs** have no trouble delivering the 1812 Overture's crescendos with power, even at very high volumes. There's an impressive degree of composure*

## Best floorstanders under £600

### Q Acoustics 3050 **£500**

**Q Acoustics** has already grabbed our budget speaker Award with the excellent 3020s and now it's the turn of their big brothers, the 3050s, to take the entry-level floorstander title.

#### Avoid a false economy

We know that it's possible to buy cheaper floorstanders than these, but every economy model we've heard has always been deeply compromised in some sonic respect or another. The 3050s are the most affordable towers we've come across that can hold their own against the best standmounters around.

As expected, they share much, technically, with their smaller siblings. They too use paper/aramid cones in their mid/bass drivers and feature the same specially shaped dome in the decoupled tweeter. The cabinet construction is similarly solid. It's made from 15mm MDF

*There's stunning clarity and texture here. Dynamic shifts are maintained over a wide range of volumes, and the level of subtlety teaches price rivals a lesson*

panels with dual-layered 20mm top plate and an even thicker front baffle, it's been further braced to control resonances.

Q Acoustics has created a hugely likeable signature sound over the years: refined, subtle and suave, yet full of punch and attack. The 3050s dutifully follow suit but prove more transparent, precise and authoritative than any of their predecessors and, as it turns out, any of the similarly priced competition.

Powerful and assertive (when driven by a suitable system, of course), the 3050s deliver a huge sense of scale and are capable of enveloping our largest test room with ease. You can place them quite far apart without losing a tight stereo image, though toeing them in helps.

Their musical, measured stance and crisp rhythmic drive lie at the heart of their sonic magic, and see us consume an entire Dire Straits album before we know it. There's stunning clarity and texture here, not to mention impressive scale. Dynamic shifts are maintained over a wide range of volumes, and the level of subtlety is enough to teach price rivals a lesson.

In many respects the Qs' performance is good enough to challenge many of the floorstanders we test at around £1000. That makes the 3050s an impressive achievement in our book.



## Best floorstander £600–£1200

### Tannoy Revolution XT 6F **£1000**

**Tannoy has done** well in this arena historically, and continues to do so again this year. The Tannoy Revolution XT 6Fs are terrific speakers for the money that deliver an immensely enjoyable listen.

We put on a bit of Prince and party like it's 1999. There's a tremendous immediacy to the Tannoys' delivery that has no problem grabbing your undivided attention. So infectious is the level of energy, you can't escape, at the very least, doing a tiny dance in your chair.

That said, these Tannoys are more than just a joyride. They're versatile performers, and while happy bopping along with Prince, they are just as content to slow down with Portishead.

#### Twin talents

Timing and dynamics are the key here, and these Tannoys are well endowed in both departments. Whatever you throw at them will be handled with precision and agility.

Meanwhile, the wide dynamic range offers enough zest to ensure the performance never veers into the clinical. Despite their lively demeanour, the sound is nice and balanced. No part of the frequency sticks out unduly.

The midrange is lovely. It's direct without being demanding. Vocals stand out without

feeling isolated. There's a good deal of bass, but it's agile and nicely controlled. By the highest standards we think the treble could be a touch sweeter, but now we're just nitpicking. Take care in system-matching and it's never an issue.

Tannoy's dual-concentric array (where the tweeter sits in the heart of the larger driver) helps improve timing and aids consistent dispersion. Such characteristics help these floorstanders deliver a stable and nicely layered sound stage, as well as explain their impressive way with rhythms.

Despite their relatively slim dimensions, the XT 6Fs can deliver a sound of pleasing scale and authority. Their downward-firing port helps them dig deep and true in the bass, while the carefully engineered drive units manage to deliver high volume levels without sacrificing refinement. It all amounts to £1000 well spent.

*There's a tremendous immediacy to the **Tannoys'** delivery that grabs you. So infectious is the level of energy, you can't escape doing a tiny dance in your chair*





## Best floorstander £1200+

### Spendor A6R £2500

**Our top floorstander** Award goes to Spendor's mighty A6Rs for the second year running, and rightly so - these are superb performers.

We're never short of speakers in our test rooms. They cover the full price range from budget models to huge monoliths that could be yours instead of a fully decked-out Mercedes.

Yet these Spendors, with their neat but unassuming appearance and wholly convincing sound, remain one of our favourites. That's down to a combination of their beautifully balanced sound, fine build and terrific engineering.

#### Frequency cohesion

These speakers are just so capable. There's a seamless quality to the way they handle the frequency range with bass, midrange and treble gelling in a wonderfully cohesive way. That low-end performance is lovely, delivering power, authority and agility in portions that most rivals can't get close to.

Resolution of detail is second to none at this price, and there are layers upon layers of information to get hold of. Notes have depth and dimension, oft-lost nuances are picked up in all their glory, and vocals are conveyed with all the reality and emotion they were recorded with.

Dynamically, the A6Rs are terrifically expressive, showing a breadth of ability that outshines excellent alternatives such as PMC's Twenty 23s. There's plenty of punch here, and no shortage of precision. These speakers stay composed even as volume levels head north.

They're not particularly forgiving, though. All that transparency combined with a very direct presentation means any shortcomings in your system, particularly if they include excess brightness or aggression, will be obvious. Just make sure you partner these speakers with electronics talented enough to let all their class-leading qualities shine.

Get it right and you'll have speakers that will keep you happy for decades. That understated exterior hides a talent of huge proportions; the Spendor A6Rs fully deserve their Best Buy status for another year.

*Notes have depth and dimension, oft-lost nuances are picked up in all their glory, and vocals are conveyed with all the reality and emotion they were recorded with*



## Best desktop under £200

### Wharfedale DS-1 £130



**We think the** Wharfedale DS-1s are a beautifully judged design. At 19cm tall they're just the right size to fit on a typical desk, on either side of a computer. It helps that they have more than a passing resemblance to the company's excellent Diamond 220 standmounters. That, in itself, is sure to give them an extra degree of hi-fi credibility among purists. Most of all, they just sound great, and do so in a sector of the market where mediocrity usually rules.

The DS-1s might be small in size, but they produce a thoroughly grown-up sound. Their tonal balance is wonderfully even - there are no spiky edges to the treble, nor does the bassline boom or trundle along with additional weight. In this respect, they are very much like their larger, pricier standmount siblings.

As they're physically small, we're hardly expecting a huge, expansive spread of sound. However, the DS-1s do go fairly loud

when the volume is cranked up, certainly loud enough to fill a smaller room

with sound. They have pretty good scale, and it's helped by a low-end performance that, while not in anyway seismic, gives enough authority to the presentation to keep it convincing.

They're surprisingly insightful too, picking up low-level details in the manner of pricier alternatives. There's a good sense of organisation here and the kind of top-end refinement that means thin-sounding, low-bitrate MP3 files remain listenable, enjoyable even.

#### It's all there in black and white

Move away from sound quality and there's still plenty to praise. The build is sturdy, and the finish - available in either gloss black or white - is impeccable. There's little evidence of overt cost-cutting and the overall impression is one of understated quality.

The DS-1's connectivity is decent. Wharfedale keeps it simple with just Bluetooth streaming (of the higher-quality aptX variety) and a 3.5mm input for hardwiring music players. They're NFC-enabled, too, so if you have a compatible smartphone just tap the device to the top of the left speaker for a swifter connection. Simple and fuss-free - just the way we like it.

These Wharfedales look smart, sound terrific, and they cost just £130. They're a great buy.

*The Wharfedale DS-1s might be small in size, but they produce a thoroughly grown-up sound. There are no spiky edges to the treble, nor does the bassline boom*

## Best desktop £200+

### KEF Egg £350

**These are officially** called the 'Kef Egg Wireless Digital Music System'. Catchy. The emphasis here is flexibility: you can use these with computers, portable devices and TVs.

Their build quality is as good as you'd hope for from such an established speaker manufacturer. While the enclosure is predominantly plastic, there's still a reassuringly weighty feel to these units, and an aura of quality most rivals lack. More practically, it will take considerable effort to knock them off your desk.

#### Transfer of information

The two KEF Eggs look identical at a glance, but this is actually a master/slave system. One does the heavy lifting and passes information to the other. All the processing takes place in the foot of the master unit, which features a mains input, mini-USB input and an output for

connecting to the slave unit, plus a subwoofer output for (optionally) adding extra lower frequencies later. There's also a hybrid 3.5mm/digital optical input behind a removable wedge of plastic at the side of the device.

The USB input can transfer high-res audio up to 24-bit/96kHz and there's Bluetooth 4.0 with support for aptX devices. You can switch between inputs and adjust volume with buttons built into the base of the master unit. Alternatively you can use the solidly built remote.

Sound quality is excellent whether you use them up close or from across the room. The use of KEF's trademark Uni-Q drivers means sound is evenly dispersed, so the character changes relatively little even when listening off-axis. Integration between the drivers is admirable too.

These speakers excel when it comes to agility and clarity. Voices are projected cleanly and with a convincing richness. It's a balanced sound, too. Despite the inclusion of a subwoofer output, we don't feel the need to add one. The low end won't shake your house's foundations,



but it goes sufficiently deep. The best thing about it is the control in the low end: there's an eloquence there that even the terrific Ruark MRIs can't quite muster.

We are very impressed with the KEF Eggs. Their flexible connectivity is a great start, and they follow through with a stunning performance across a variety of placements.

*These **KEF Egg** speakers excel when it comes to agility and clarity. Voices are projected cleanly and with a convincing richness. It's a balanced sound, too*

## Jargon buster: Speakers

**If you're relatively** new to the world of hi-fi, you may be bamboozled by some of the jargon and lingo involved. Choosing the right pair of stereo speakers is fundamental to your enjoyment of music, so let *What Hi-Fi?* explain some of the more common technical terms, so you're ready to get out there and buy your first pair of speakers with confidence.

#### Bi-wire

Speakers that are bi-wired have two pairs of speaker terminals. This allows for two connections to be made between the amplifier and the speaker; one for high frequency sounds and another for mid/bass frequencies.

#### Coloration

Any tonal alterations or distortion added to the original signal can be classified as coloration.

#### Crossover

The circuit inside a speaker that splits, or filters the incoming signal, sending high frequencies to the tweeter and midrange/bass to the larger unit.

#### Dynamics

A speaker's dynamic ability is the way it goes from quiet to loud and back. The best speakers manage this quickly, in a smooth sweep. The difference

between the quietest sounds the speaker produces and the loudest is called the dynamic range.

#### Sensitivity

A measure of how loud a speaker will go for a given input power. Typical values are around 89dB/W/m. Every 3dB of sensitivity means you'll need only half the amplifier power to go as loud.

#### Tweeter

A type of loudspeaker usually shaped like a small dome or cone, designed to reproduce high frequency sounds. Typically this varies from 2,000Hz to 20,000Hz, the upper limit of human hearing.

#### Woofer

Usually the largest drive unit. It is designed to deliver low frequency sounds, typically from around 40Hz to 1000Hz. Can be used in multiples to increase output.

The tweeter suffering from a bad case of coloration? Best check the crossover...



*Relatively new to the world of hi-fi? Bamboozled by some of the jargon and lingo? Let What Hi-Fi? explain some of the more common technical terms*



# Readers' Award

The shortlist was more varied than ever, and the winner was pushed all the way to wire. Ultimately, though, there can be only one...



**PRODUCT** OF THE **YEAR**

## Readers' Award

**Naim Mu-so £895**

When future generations look back with a warm nostalgic glow at the heyday of wireless streaming, the Naim Mu-so is going to look like a pivotal product. Here's where the more venerable representatives of the traditional hi-fi industry realised the premium wireless speaker was not only a viable proposition, but a gratifying raiser of both a company's profile and profitability.

Of course, there's a bit more to producing a product like this than shoving the necessary components into a box and slapping a credible brand-name onto it. The biggest part of the genius of the Mu-so is the absolute lack of compromise Naim has demonstrated when it comes to what's acceptable in terms of design, construction and ultimate sound quality. This is recognised on p101, where the Mu-so is crowned our 2015 Best Buy for wireless speakers, and it's reiterated here. The Mu-so was up against some very capable products indeed on our Readers' Award shortlist, and it is testament to the unarguable correctness of what the Mu-so does, and the way it looks and feels while it's doing it, that the Naim has prevailed.

A hefty, purposeful combination of brushed and anodised, bead-blasted aluminium, the Mu-so looks good. It feels good too, thanks to a gloriously tactile volume-control-cum-touchscreen - this may be the only product we prefer to control manually rather than by its (perfectly capable and acceptable) remote control or app. Spec-wise it's on the money, with ample connectivity, more-than adequate power and file compatibility bordering on the promiscuous.

In action, there's very little to criticise about the Mu-so's performance. It's an agile, assertive listen, with seemingly limitless dynamic headroom and the sort of low-end authority that makes The Flaming Lips' *Waitin' For A Superman* sound as deep as it does wide and tall. Detailed and subtle, deft with the details and with a soundstage that's explicit and focused, the Naim can turn its hand to any genre you care to nominate without hesitation.

It's arguably a bigger achievement to win this Award than any of the others in this magazine - the Mu-so's emergence as so many people's favourite product of the year is not to be underestimated.

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# A NEW CATEGORY OF TV

Staggering colour and contrast, supreme detail, great sound... say hello to the future of television

**R**emember the first time you saw Full HD? The difference in quality? The immersiveness? Time for that again. This is the LG 55EF950V. It's the first flat OLED 4K TV ever, and what you've been waiting for.

Each pixel emits its own light, so one can be white while its neighbour is black – meaning staggering, infinite contrast and amazingly accurate yet vivid colour. But this TV also has more pixels – four times as many – as a Full HD TV. It makes for astonishing detail, as well as OLED's superb motion handling and true-to-life colour. Get one of these and you'll want to shout about it; to get people round to watch movies and sport, and play games.

And it's not just the picture. There's also the harman / kardon™ speakers that pack a punch not usually associated with ultra-thin screens. And the stand – which makes the TV appear to float. The set comes with LG's acclaimed webOS smart platform too, and with it, content from the likes of Netflix, NOW TV, BBC iPlayer and Amazon Prime.

This is not just a new TV, this is a whole new category of television.



## PROMOTION: PERFECT SOUNDBAR PARTNERS

### HS9 ULTIMATE HOME CINEMA



Buy an incredible, 700W HS9 soundbar and enjoy massive 7.1 surround sound, and get a pair of compact, wireless LG H3 speakers, free.

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The curved HS8 soundbar is the ultimate in design, and with a 200W wireless subwoofer, it's the ultimate in sound. Buy one and get two H3 speakers free.

### HS7 THE UPGRADE PACK



360W of 4.1-channel sound and a 200W wireless sub, the HS7 is a perfect start. Buy one and you can get two H3 wireless speakers for £100 more.



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**LG**  
Life's Good

LG TV Featured EF950V

# ED TV

## LG 55EF950V

Incredible colour, contrast and detail on this flat panel combine with premium audio by Harman / Kardon™ and Smart TV with webOS

**Display** 55in OLED  
**Resolution** ULTRA HD 4K (3840 x 2160 pixels)  
**Audio** 2.0-channel

## OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE OLED

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
★★★★★



**Stuff**  
★★★★★

### LG 55EG960V

Fusing OLED technology with 4K resolution, LG OLED 4K TV brings you the finest viewing experience imaginable.

**Display** 55in OLED  
**Resolution** ULTRA HD 4K (3840 x 2160 pixels)  
**Audio** 2.0-channel



### LG 55EG920V

Ultra-slim curved design, jaw-dropping detail, colour and black levels and premium sound by Harman / Kardon™

**Display** 55in OLED  
**Resolution** ULTRA HD 4K (3840 x 2160 pixels)  
**Audio** 2.0-channel



### LG 55EG910V

A Full HD OLED TV with deep blacks, incredible colour and amazing detail – for a price that will amaze you.

**Display** 55in OLED  
**Resolution** Full HD 1080 (1920 x 1080 pixels)  
**Audio** 2.0 channel



### LG 55EC930V

Not ready for 4K? Full HD OLED just as great. Its curve immerses you and webOS puts a world's worth of content at your fingertips.

**Display** 55in OLED  
**Resolution** Full HD (1920 x 1080 pixels)  
**Audio** 2.0-channel





# WHAT HI-FI?

## iPAD EDITION

Awards 2015 issue available on iTunes now

The No.1 source of clear, expert and independent advice

# BUYER'S GUIDE

NEW

All our new **Award winners** are listed in these pages, so you've got no excuse not to get a top shortlist for your new purchase.

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For full reviews, get a barcode scanner app on your smartphone. Scan these little squares and they'll take you to the relevant section on [whathifi.com](http://whathifi.com)

## All the latest kit, all the latest ratings...

Welcome to the **UK's best guide** to TVs, hi-fi, home cinema and mobile, with star ratings for more than **1500 products**. Where other magazines rely on isolated

writers reviewing in a range of locations, our star ratings are decided by an **expert team** of reviewers working together, in a **state-of-the-art testing facility**.

Within this guide you'll find all our favourite **four- and five-star** products - including **Award-winners** - to help you pick the best kit for your budget.



Kobina Monney, Buyer's Guide Editor

### Exciting new additions...



#### Samsung UE65JS9500, p132

"Another showstopper from Samsung. Worth every penny of its hefty pricetag"



#### KEF Egg, p159

"The Eggs follow through with a stunning performance that is consistently competent across a variety of placements."

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# Your essential system set-ups

# BEST BUYS

GET THE  
BEST KIT  
FOR YOUR  
BUDGET

## Home Cinema Systems

## Hi-Fi Systems

### BLU-RAY PLAYERS



**SONY BDP-S4500**  
★★★★★  
**£75**

Simply astonishing performance and pictures for less than £100. Smart functionality too: you can't go wrong...

### RECEIVERS



**YAMAHA RX-V377**  
★★★★★  
**£260**

This is the perfect entry-level option for those upgrading to five-channel sound on a budget. It's a brilliant buy.

### SPEAKERS



**Q ACOUSTICS 2000i 5.1 PACK**  
★★★★★  
**£625**

Our 2013 Award winner produces sound with impressive scale for movies and music.

### DISPLAYS



**SONY KDL-40W605**  
★★★★★  
**£450**

If you're after a great all-rounder in both picture quality and smart features, this TV is it. Splendid.

### CD PLAYERS



**MARANTZ CD6005**  
★★★★★  
**£300**

This incredibly musical player offers detail in spades, not to mention a great way with dynamics.

### AMPLIFIERS



**MARANTZ PM6005**  
★★★★★  
**£300**

A return to form by Marantz in this market, and a fine match for its CD-player sibling.

### SPEAKERS



**DALI ZENSOR 3**  
★★★★★  
**£300**

An entertaining and easy listen - an airy, spacious sound with detail, punch and great tonal balance.



**SONY BDP-S7200**  
★★★★★  
**£250**

Sony's new Blu-ray offering is a really remarkable achievement. It has huge ability with images and sound.



**SONY STR-DN860**  
★★★★★  
**£400**

Incredible value, this home-cinema powerhouse has pretty much all the features and ability you want.



**DALI ZENSOR 15.1**  
★★★★★  
**£980**

This package is as entertaining as it is insightful, delivering all the drama and punch we could hope for. Superb.



**SAMSUNG UE48H64800**  
★★★★★  
**£700**

A whole lot of screen for your money - and this is a superb performer as well. A bargain.



**CYRUS Cdi**  
★★★★★  
**£1050**

A player that puts detail resolution, agility and dynamic expression above all else. Which is why we love it.



**REGA ELEX-R**  
★★★★★  
**£900**

One of the most talented sub-£1k amplifiers we know. Delivers a fast, agile sound with superb dynamic shifts.



**TANNOY REV'N XT 6F**  
★★★★★  
**£1000**

Fast, responsive floorstanders with strong dynamics, crisp timing and impressive detail.



**PIONEER BDP-LX58**  
★★★★★  
**£600**

A beautifully crisp, punchy picture and dynamically capable sound make this a stellar Blu-ray player



**PIONEER SC-LX58**  
★★★★★  
**£1400**

Mature, powerful, refined - this amp will make you feel as if you're sitting in a large cinema hall.



**KEF R100 5.1**  
★★★★★  
**£2850**

Best Buy for 2013 and 2014, the R100 5.1 is simply superb with demanding film soundtracks - great in stereo too.



**SONY VPL-HW55ES**  
★★★★★  
**£2800**

Superb in 2D, this projector also excels at 3D. Edges are sharp, pictures have depth and stability.



**ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 CD PLAYER**  
★★★★★  
**£1900**

Combines bite, refinement and rhythm better than anything else we've heard at this price.



**REGA ELICIT-R**  
★★★★★  
**£1600**

The best-value premium stereo amp we know: surefooted, with superb timing, it's very revealing too.



**SPENDOR A6R**  
★★★★★  
**£2500**

Attacking, detailed and balanced, these floorstanders demonstrate a winning way with dynamics.

## Complete your home cinema system

### SET-TOP BOXES

**Sky+HD 2TB**  
£250  
**Humax HDR-1000S (500GB)** £220  
**Humax DTR-T1010**  
£230

### PROJECTORS

**BenQ W1080 ST+**  
£1000  
**Epson EH-TW7200** £1900  
**Sony VPL-HW55ES**  
£2800

### COMPACT SPKRS

**Tannoy HTS101**  
£400  
**Q Acoustics Q7000i**  
£900  
**B&W MT60D**  
£1950

### SUBWOOFERS

**B&W ASW610**  
£400  
**B&W ASW610XP**  
£700  
**Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra**  
£1400

### STYLE SPEAKERS

**Tannoy HTS-101**  
£350  
**Q Acoustics Q7000i**  
£900  
**B&W MT-60D**  
£1950

### SOUNDBARS

**Philips HTL 5140**  
£270  
**Q Acoustics Media 4**  
£400  
**Dali Kubik 1**  
£800

### SUPPORTS

**Target CL430**  
£190  
**Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40** £460  
**Atacama Moseco 6**  
£120  
**REMOTE CONTROLS**  
**One For All Zapper**  
£10  
**Logitech Harmony One** £125  
**Logitech Harmony 1000** £280

## Grow your hi-fi system

### TURNTABLES

**Pro-Ject Essential II**  
£200  
**Rega RP3/Elys2**  
£550  
**Clearaudio Concept**  
£1000

### TABLETS

**iPad Mini**  
£200 (16GB)  
**Google Nexus 10**  
£390 (32GB)  
**Apple iPad Air**  
£480 (32GB)

### RADIOS

**Roberts Stream 93i**  
£150  
**Revo SuperConnect**  
£250  
**Arcam T32**  
£480

### HEADPHONES

**Sony MDR-EX650AP**  
£60  
**AKG Y50**  
£80  
**Philips Fidelio M1MKII** £180

### MICRO SYSTEMS

**Denon D-M39DAB**  
£310  
**Cambridge Minx Xi**  
£600  
**Naim UnitiQute 2**  
£1150

### AUDIO CABLES

**QED XT40**  
£10/m  
**Atlas Elements Integra** £45  
**Supra USB 2.0**  
£30

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**NODE 2 • POWERNODE 2 • VAULT 2 • PULSE • PULSE MINI • PULSE FLEX** Prices from £269

NEW

£429  
OR LESS



#### SONOS • PLAY:5 • WIRELESS SPEAKER SYSTEM

Step up to the all-new PLAY:5; the powerfully smart speaker that fine-tunes its sound to bring you all the energy and emotion the artist packed into the original recording. Music that's pure, ferocious, tasty and true.

WHAT IS IT?

ANALOGUE SYSTEM

£895  
OR LESS



#### NAIM • MU-SO • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM

Combines Naim's expertise in streaming, amplification and loudspeaker technology. Mu-so is the stage your music deserves, bringing you closer to the songs that inspire your life.

NEW

£499.99  
OR LESS



#### B&W • ZEPPELIN WIRELESS SPEAKER SYSTEM

Introducing the Zeppelin Wireless. The instantly recognisable silhouette may be the same, but every element of the speaker has been redesigned to deliver superlative audio performance; once again redefining what is possible from a single speaker system.

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WHAT IS IT?

ANALOGUE SYSTEM

£299  
OR LESS



#### RUARK AUDIO • MR1 • BLUETOOTH SPEAKER SYSTEM

Standing just 17cm tall, the MR1 speakers feature 20W of Class A-B amplification, a 75mm mid/bass unit and 20mm tweeter in each enclosure. The handcrafted cabinets are finished in a choice of rich walnut veneer, soft white or soft black lacquer.

NEW

£299.95  
OR LESS



#### KEF • MUO • BLUETOOTH SPEAKER

Packed with innovative technologies to deliver uncompromised KEF quality sound when you're streaming music wirelessly from a computer or mobile device, MUO packs a punch that is out of all proportion to its size.

NEW

£349.95  
OR LESS



#### KEF • EGG • BLUETOOTH SPEAKERS

Streaming tracks wirelessly over Bluetooth aptX or bringing your TV or computer to life, the new EGG Wireless Digital Music System delivers pure, clear KEF quality sound.

NEW

£149  
OR LESS



#### MONITOR AUDIO AIRSTREAM S150 BLUETOOTH SPEAKER

Monitor Audio has packed the delicious Airstream S150 Bluetooth speaker with the high energy sound of our award-winning audio technology for music lovers to savour from room-to-room.

NEW

£299.99  
OR LESS



#### B&W • T7 • BLUETOOTH SPEAKER SYSTEM

Introducing the pick-up-and-play hi-fi speaker. Perfectly sized for bedrooms, kitchens and gardens, T7 is B&W's most portable, versatile wireless system yet.

NEW

£199  
OR LESS



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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£209 OR LESS

#### PRO-JECT • ESSENTIAL II • TURNTABLE

Entry-level "plug'n'play" two speed turntable with single piece aluminium tonearm and pre-fitted Ortofon OM5e cartridge.



£329 OR LESS

#### FLEXSON • VINYLPLAY • DIGITAL TURNTABLE

Gives the best-of-both-worlds: an excellent record player that's easy to use and can be simply integrated into a streaming system.



£249 OR LESS

5 YEAR WARRANTY

#### NAD • C 556 • TURNTABLE

Time to enjoy vinyl collections with extraordinary quality! With a minimalist design, the C 556 turntable offers accurate reproduction by using performance-focused parts and components that put music first.



£575 OR LESS

#### PRO-JECT • 1 XPRESSION CARBON UKX • TURNTABLE

With its Carbon armtube and supplied Ortofon 2m Silver cartridge, the 1 Xpression Carbon UKX sets new standards in its price range.



£425 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

#### ARCAM • irDAC • DAC

Designed to be the heart of a digital system. Includes asynchronous USB and a direct iPod input to optimise sound quality. All inputs can be controlled through an IR remote that will also control iPods, iPhones, PC and Mac computers.



£599 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

#### AUDIOLAB • M-DAC • DAC / PREAMP

Award-winning DAC featuring a USB input with asynchronous data processing along with two coaxial and optical digital inputs. High-res 24-bit/192kHz music files can be played via its coaxial input.



£799 OR LESS

NEW

£995 OR LESS

#### ARCAM • FMJ CDS27 / FMJ A29 • CD / AMPLIFIER

Introducing Arcam's audiophile Class G integrated amplifier and SACD/CD player with Network streaming up to 192/24 for class leading sound quality.



NEW

£899 OR LESS

NEW

£999 OR LESS

#### AUDIOLAB • 8300CD / 8300A • CD / AMPLIFIER

The 8300CD improves upon its illustrious predecessor and delivers even better performance while the 8300A includes radically redesigned circuitry and a high-performance phono stage.



£249 OR LESS

5 YEAR WARRANTY

#### NAD • C 516BEE / C 316BEE • CD / AMPLIFIER

Received an outstanding product award from Hi-Fi News magazine who described the C 316BEE as an "absolute barn-stormer of an amplifier". The C 516BEE is the perfect partner.



£1080

£990

#### NAIM • CD5si / NAIT 5si • CD PLAYER / AMPLIFIER

Enjoy outstanding performance from your CDs with this highly acclaimed Naim CD/Amplifier combination. Available from selected stores. Visit [www.ssav.com](http://www.ssav.com) for details



NEW

£1299 OR LESS

£1249 OR LESS

#### ROKSAN • K3 • CD / AMPLIFIER

New integrated amplifier with aptX Bluetooth, a phono input plus five additional line inputs for other sources. The K3 CD Di player is the perfect match for the K3 amplifier. Three finish options available.



ESSAV .COM

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

#### MARANTZ • CD6005 / PM6005 • CD / AMPLIFIER

Replacing the 6004 models, the 6005 amp gains digital inputs using the same 24-bit/192kHz DAC as the CD player which now features enhanced USB playback and improved performance.



NEW

£499 OR LESS

#### MARANTZ • M-CR611 • CD/STREAMING SYSTEM

The M-CR611 is a superb performer, reproducing excellent CD-audio, FM, DAB/DAB+ and Network files. Supports 192kHz / 24-bit high-resolution files, 2.8MHz DSD files and Gapless playback.



£399 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Bluetooth

NAID • D 3020 AMPLIFIER / DAC  
Features digital and analogue inputs plus the convenience of wireless streaming with its Bluetooth capability.



5 YEAR WARRANTY



£1295

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

#### NAIM • UNITIQUITE 2 ALL-IN-ONE STREAMING SYSTEM

All-in-one system featuring a 30W amplifier, FM/DAB/Internet radio and wired and wireless connections to play network digital audio. UnitiQute 2 can play USB-stored music files of up to 32bit/192kHz resolution.

#### B&W • P5 WIRELESS HEADPHONES

NEW

£329 OR LESS



#### GRADO • SR325e HEADPHONES

£299 OR LESS



#### NAD • VISO HP30 HEADPHONES

NEW

£169 OR LESS



#### SENNHEISER MOMENTUM 2.0 WIRELESS HEADPHONES

£379.95 OR LESS





**BOWERS & WILKINS • 685 S2**  
At home on a stand, wall or bookshelf, the versatile 685 S2 is ideal for stereo and home theatre uses in most rooms. And performance is enhanced with the addition of a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter.

**£499 OR LESS**

Price excludes stands



**PMC • TWENTY-22**  
An astonishingly natural balance and high dynamic capability are the hallmarks of this speaker. It creates a precise sound stage and profound bass performance from its compact cabinet.

**£2075 OR LESS**



**Q ACOUSTICS • 3050**  
The flagship 3050 is the perfect speaker for larger rooms, boasting ultra-low levels of distortion, typically found of speakers costing three or four times its price.

**NEW £499 OR LESS**

Standard finishes £649



**BOWERS & WILKINS CM10 S2**  
The flagship floorstanding speaker of the CM Series sets a new standard for performance. It combines technologies taken from across B&W's ranges. The result simply sounds and looks beautiful.

**£2999 OR LESS**



**MONITOR AUDIO GOLD 200**  
Amazing scale and impressive dynamic control are available from this slender three-way design, comprising ribbon tweeters, twin 5.5" bass drivers and a 4" mid-range driver, which is housed in a dedicated enclosure.

**NEW £2299 OR LESS**



**PSB IMAGINE X1T**  
A deceptively slim and discreet floorstanding design, the Imagine X1T has wide bandwidth and high SPL output capabilities that defy its modest size. Features identical 5 1/4" woofers plus a one-inch pure titanium dome tweeter.

**£749 OR LESS**

**5 YEAR WARRANTY**



**KEF • LS50**  
An innovative concept derived from the legendary LS3/5a. Rarely the case in such a compact design, the LS50 monitor delivers a rich, multi-dimensional 'soundstage experience' that is out of all proportion to its size.

**£799 OR LESS**

**NEW WHITE FINISH**



**MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE 2**  
The Bronze 2 builds on the strength of its predecessor's audiophile credibility with a neutral tonal balance and high detail resolution combined with high overall efficiency and power handling.

**NEW £279 OR LESS**



**Q ACOUSTICS 3020**  
Replacing the award-winning 2020i speakers, the 3020 incorporates numerous improvements including a revised cabinet with wool fibre damping plus new bespoke drive units.

**NEW £189 OR LESS**

Standard finishes £249



**PODSPEAKERS • SMALLPOD • SPEAKERS**  
SmallPod does everything a great pair of hi-fi speakers should do, but all wrapped up in gorgeous curves and colours.

**NEW £249 OR LESS**

**GLOSS RED**  
**GLOSS BLACK**  
**GLOSS WHITE**



**PODSPEAKERS • MICROPOD • BLUETOOTH SPEAKERS**  
Introducing the MicroPod Bluetooth. These stylish speakers are ideal for tablets and smartphones are as simple to connect without the need for unsightly wires.

**NEW £199 OR LESS**

**GLOSS RED**  
**GLOSS BLACK**  
**GLOSS WHITE**

**Bluetooth**



**SONOS**  
**THE WIRELESS Hi-Fi SYSTEM**

The Sonos Wireless HiFi System delivers all the music on earth, in every room, with warm, full-bodied sound that's crystal clear at any volume. Sonos can fill your home with music by combining HiFi sound and rock-solid wireless in a smart system that is easy to set-up, control and expand.

**PRICES FROM £169**



**BLUESOUND**  
HiFi for a wireless generation

Take hi-fi to even new heights with Bluesound's next generation. Features improved wi-fi performance, more digital and analog connectivity options and Bluetooth aptX along with support for premium music services like Tidal and Spotify. **PRICES FROM £269**

**Hi Res AUDIO**

**5 YEAR WARRANTY**

**NEW**

**Bluetooth**

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## Real Stores

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision have 25 stores nationwide with plans to open more during 2015. Each carries the best in home cinema and Hi-Fi equipment on display, ready for you to watch, listen to and compare in our dedicated demonstration rooms.

## Real Products

A wide selection of products from the world's leading manufacturers is in stock and available for you to take home. We also offer a delivery and installation service as well as a convenient on-line click and reserve option for many of our products.

## Real People

Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and passionate about music and film and the equipment needed to get the most out of your collection. They will be delighted to assist you in making the right selection to ensure you enjoy your system for years to come.

## Real Value

Fantastic value for money is our aim. Although we remain independent, you will be pleasantly surprised just how competitive we can be - with the added benefit of seeing, hearing and touching the product before you buy, and someone to help if things go wrong.

Please Note: Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO).

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NEW

£499  
OR LESS



### DENON • AVR-X2200W • AV RECEIVER

7.2-channel receiver with Dolby Atmos, Spotify Connect support, Bluetooth, AirPlay and DSD streaming.

Also Available: DENON AVR-X3200W & AVR-X4200W



NEW

£499  
OR LESS



### PIONEER • VSX-930 • AV RECEIVER

New 7.2-channel Network receiver with Dolby Atmos, Wi-Fi, AirPlay, DLNA, Bluetooth and Hi-Res audio playback.

Also Available: ONKYO TX-NR646



NEW

£1399  
OR LESS



### PIONEER • SC-LX59 • AV RECEIVER

New 9.2-channel Network AV receiver with Dolby Atmos, Wi-Fi, AirPlay, DLNA, Bluetooth and Hi-Res audio playback.

Also Available: PIONEER SC-LX89



NEW

£499  
OR LESS

### SONY • STR-DN1060 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver with Bluetooth and NFC compatibility, for instant wireless playback from any compatible device.

Also Available: MARANTZ NR1606



NEW

£550  
OR LESS



### YAMAHA • RX-V379 • AV RECEIVER

5.1-channel AV Receiver supporting Bluetooth for wireless music streaming and 4K Ultra HD pass-through.

Also Available: YAMAHA RX-V679



NEW

£999  
OR LESS



### YAMAHA • RX-A1050 • AV RECEIVER

New 7.2-channel full 4K Ultra HD network AV receiver with Dolby Atmos, Wi-Fi, AirPlay, Bluetooth and Spotify Connect.

Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A850 & RX-A3050

### DENON • HEOS HOME CINEMA • SOUNDBAR / SUB

Latest addition to Denon's HEOS range features Dolby Digital and DTS decoders, digital, USB and AUX inputs. TV sound can be distributed throughout HEOS eco system and controlled with the HEOS app or your TVs remote control.

NEW

£599  
OR LESS



### CANTON • DM 55 • SOUNDBASE

The Canton DM 55 sets a new standard for TV sound. Intended to be positioned under a TV's pedestal stand, the DM 55 creates a convincing, room filling sound.

NEW

£329  
OR LESS



### PSB • VS21 • SOUNDBASE

PSB has been creating award-winning home theatre speaker systems for decades, and the VS21 brings this extraordinary experience to the sound bar category.

NEW

£399  
OR LESS



5 YEAR  
WARRANTY

### Q ACOUSTICS • MEDIA 4 • SOUNDBAR

The new Q Acoustics Media 4 is a high performance Soundbar designed to deliver high fidelity reproduction of music, and high quality audio from a TV or set top box, tablets and smartphones.



£550  
OR LESS

### YAMAHA • YSP-1600 • DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

Stylishly slim Soundbar featuring Digital Sound Projector technology for real 5.1ch surround sound. MusicCast for enjoying a variety of music sources anywhere in your house. HDCP2.2 compliant HDMI supports 4K Ultra HD input.

NEW

£499  
OR LESS



### YAMAHA • YSP-5600 • DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

3D sound reproduction equivalent to 7.1.2 channels realised using Yamaha's unique Digital Sound Projector technology to let you enjoy movies and music with thrilling 3D surround sound. Includes Yamaha's MusicCast functionality.

NEW

£1599  
OR LESS



### B&W • MT-50 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

This system swaps the PV1D for the compact but punchy ASW608 Subwoofer. Available in a matt black or white.

£1089  
OR LESS



### KEF • R100 5.1 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Comprises four R100 speakers, an R200C centre speaker and R400B active subwoofer. Great for both home cinema and music.

£2849  
OR LESS

### REL • T5i SUBWOOFER

New compact active subwoofer featuring a down firing, high quality, AlloyFibre™ composite driver which eliminates the need for a grille and produces maximum coupling with the floor.



NEW

£499  
OR LESS



### Q ACOUSTICS 2000i CINEMA PACK

The Q Acoustics 2000i Cinema Pack features unrivalled sonic performance and breathtaking value for money. The designers have surpassed themselves. Its precision soundstage, powerful dynamics and rich deep bass make it the natural choice for both home cinema enthusiasts and discerning music lovers.

£599  
OR LESS

SAVE  
£200

GLOSS  
BLACK

GLOSS  
WHITE



NEW

£5849  
OR LESS

### SONY • VPL-VW320ES • 4K SXRD PROJECTOR

A fantastic option for movie lovers who want an incredible cinematic experience at home, far beyond the reach of TV.



**SAMSUNG**  
**SUHD TV**<sup>4K</sup>

**UE55JS9000 • 55" CURVED 4K UHD TV**

Welcome to a new world of picture quality. The revolutionary S9000 SUHD TV doesn't just raise the bar, it changes the game. This is a new benchmark for design with stunning looks from whatever angle you look at it and picture quality previously only seen in professional editing suites. It's a new world of colour, brightness and contrast, immersed in a sleek and elegant package.

**FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY** Also Available **48 65**

Ask in-store for the latest promotion

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**SONY** **NEW**

**KD-55X9305C • 55" 4K UHD TV**

The new X93C 4K 3D TV includes Sony's powerful 4K processor X1 chip designed for optimal playback of 4K material and upscaling of lower resolution content to near 4K resolution along with Triluminos colour technology, Motionflow XR1200Hz and edge-lit LED backlighting. This Android TV lets you connect and enjoy any content, from apps to movies, between different Android devices – the simplest and easiest way ever.

The 'wedge' design accommodates the all-important speakers which are the compatible with the new Hi-resolution audio specifications, with the ability to upscale audio to better than CD quality.

**FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY** **4K Ultra HD TV** Also Available **65**



**LG OLED 4K TV**

**55EG920V • 55" 4K UHD OLED TV**

Fusing OLED technology with 4K resolution, LG OLED 4K TV brings you the finest viewing experience imaginable. With self-lighting pixels - meaning they switch on and off individually - OLED delivers the purest blacks, most brilliant colours and clearest images. Add to that a unique four colour pixel and you will see that LG OLED 4K TV is the most advanced TV ever.

Ask in-store for the latest promotion

**FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY** **NEW**



Ask in-store for the latest promotion

**SONY • KD-55X8509C • 55" 4K UHD TV**

Also Available **65 75** **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**



**NEW**

Ask in-store for the latest promotion

**PANASONIC • TX-50CX802 • 50" 4K UHD TV**

Also Available **40 55 65** **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**



Ask in-store for the latest promotion

**SAMSUNG • UE55JU7000 • 4K UHD TV**

Also Available **40 48 65 75 85** **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**



**£995 OR LESS**

**ARCAM • FMJ UDP411 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER**

With more than ten years of digital video experience, not to mention global recognition of its efforts, Arcam is proud to announce the arrival of its newest disc player, the UDP411.

Also Available: MARANTZ UD7007



**£499 OR LESS**

**PIONEER • BDP-LX58 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER**

Enter the world of superior sound and 4K ultra HD pictures. The BDP-LX58 provides just that and more. Experience your Blu-ray films on a whole new level.

Also Available: PIONEER BDP-LX88



**£179 OR LESS**

**SONY • BDP-S7200 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER**

The new Sony BDP-S7200 3D Blu-ray Player with 4K upscaling and powerful smart features - it will be the centre piece of your home entertainment system.

Also Available: SONY BDP-S5500 & BDP-S6200

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Norwich • 01603 767605  
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## LCD, LED & OLED TVs

LCD	Once only in smaller screens; now the most common type of panel
LED	This refers to the kind of backlighting used on an LCD panel
OLED	An ultra-thin screen that's commonly used in curved TVs

### The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

**Panasonic TX-40CS520**

Awards 2015: Best 40-46in TV under £500



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

**Samsung UE48J6300**

Awards 2015: Best 47-52in TV under £1000



AWARD WINNER

**Samsung UE55JS8500**

Awards 2015: Best 52-60in TV under £2500

### Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	FreeSat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £500</b>													
Finlux 32H8075-T	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Decent picture and smart features – cracking value for the price	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	3	43x73x6
Finlux 48FT3E2425-T	400	09.15/GT	★★★★★	A big screen for a low price, this Finlux is most impressive	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x108x7
Linsar X24-DVD	300	04.15/FT	★★★★★	ATV with a built-in soundbar that's a credible option for a second room	LED	24	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	39x56x11
<b>Panasonic TX-40CS520</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>10.15/FT</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>Best 40-46in TV under £500, Awards 2015</b>	<b>LED</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1920x1080</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>52x90x5</b>
Panasonic TX-42AS500B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A user-friendly TV that's a little lacking in black levels but is worth a look	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	57x96x7
Panasonic TX-32AS500B	300	11.14/ST	★★★★★	A multi-talented set but its picture could do with some more subtlety	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	47x73x7
Panasonic TX-132E6B	380	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Quite simply one of the best 32in TVs we've tested	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	43x72x5
Philips 32PHT4509/12	280	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Insightful, refined and available at a good price. Worth a look	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	42x72x6
Polaroid 3-32-LED-14	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Another tempting package from Polaroid	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	3	44x74x10
Polaroid 5-42-LED-14	370	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A surprising performer that stands up to more established brands	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	56x96x6
Samsung UE32H6400	460	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Near flawless. Pricey, but comes with a bundle of features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	43x73x6
Samsung UE40F6400	480	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A stunning, feature-laden TV from Samsung. Recommended	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x93x5
Sony KDL-32W706B	350	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 32in TV, Awards 2014	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	43x73x6
Sony KDL-40W605B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 40-46in TV, Awards 2014	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	55x93x9
Toshiba 40L6353	400	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Clunky interface aside, this is a decent TV with a great HD picture	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x92x27
Toshiba 40L6453DB	430	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Rivals are slicker, but this Toshiba has an attractive picture	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	57x96x9
<b>£500-£2000</b>													
Finlux 42FME2425-T	500	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Sharp picture, decent detail and smart features. Finlux is back on form	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	56x96x6
John Lewis 55JL9100	1200	10.15/GT	★★★★★	Essentially a re-branded LG 4K TV and a fine one at that	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	3	78x124x26
LG 42LB700V	550	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A fine set, with WebOS being the main attraction here	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	56x95x6
LG 47LB730V	1000	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Solid sound, premium build and a good picture. A fine effort from LG	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	62x106x5.5
Panasonic TX-40CX680B	700	08.15/FT	★★★★★	Panasonic's 40in set flies the flag for small 4K TVs	LED	40	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	3	52x90x5
Panasonic TX-50CS520	500	10.15/GT	★★★★★	You'd struggle to find a Full HD set better than this for the same price	LED	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	69x113x23
Panasonic TX-50CX802B	1800	09.15/FT	★★★★★	Finally, a 4K TV that puts in a blistering performance with Full HD content	LED	50	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	3	65x112x5
Panasonic TX-L42FT60B	1100	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Likeable TV with a fine picture and great features	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	56x96x4
Panasonic TX-L47AS650B	800	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A talented set, but other TVs have the edge in terms of value	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x107x5
Panasonic TX-L50ET60B	1300	05.13/FT	★★★★★	Solid telly but could perform better	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	66x112x4
Panasonic TX-L50E6B	850	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine picture quality but there are TVs that give more for less	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	71x112x27
Philips 47PFL6008	1200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but forgivable thanks to its brilliant picture quality	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x106x3
Philips 55PFS6609	1200	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Dazzling with HD content, but rivals offer better overall performance	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
Philips 48PFS57093	750	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas but its SD performance is an area of concern	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	62x108x6
Polaroid P55D600	700	07.15/GT	★★★★★	No 4K streaming but this Polaroid is a more-than-capable performer	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	80x125x24
Samsung UE40ES6800	950	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Good spec and looks, but the backlight isn't great	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	67x92x33
Samsung UE40F6500	900	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Not a class leader but offers a lot for your money	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	91x60x27
Samsung UE40H6400	550	10.14/GT	★★★★★	An engrossing TV with plenty of smarts and a cracking picture	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x92x5
Samsung UE48H6400	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 47-52in TV, Awards 2014	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	63x109x5
<b>Samsung UE40JU7000</b>	<b>880</b>	<b>11.15/GT</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>Best 40-46in TV £500+, Awards 2015</b>	<b>LED</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3840x2160</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>59x92x27</b>
Samsung UE48HU7500	1600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Some minor flaws aside, this is a great smaller-sized 4K set	LED	48	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	62x107x36
<b>Samsung UE48J6300</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>09.15/GT</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>Best 47-52in TV under £1000, Awards 2015. Product of the Year</b>	<b>LED</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>1920x1080</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>62x108x12</b>

## TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Samsung UE48JU7000</b>	1250	10.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best 47-52in TV £1000+, Awards 2015</b>	LED	48	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	68x109x28
Sony KD-65W855C	1500	08.15/FT	★★★★★	Makes a strong case for sticking with Full HD sets	LED	65	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	60x96x18
Sony KDL-42W705B	530	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A promising start for Sony's Full HD range. A consistent performer	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	56x96x6
Sony KDL-42W805A	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking TV with many strengths	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	58x97x6
Sony KDL-43X8305C	779	11.15/GT	★★★★★	An entry-level 4K TV that isn't quite the measure of its competition	LED	43	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	60x96x19
Sony KDL-46W905	1550	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A very capable TV with stunning detail but the picture lacks vibrancy	LCD	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	65x105x30
Sony KDL-48W605B	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A competitive performer with good picture quality	LCD	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	68x108x9
Sony KDL-50W805C	1100	09.15/GT	★★★★★	A set with a number of features to go with its vivid, inviting picture	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x6
Sony KDL-50W829B	900	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses a star but this TV is still worth an audition	LED	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	66x112x6
Sony KDL-55W955B	1600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A good TV but we expect more from a flagship set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	79x124x9
<b>£2000 and above</b>														
Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11	5250	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A truly luxurious TV that delivers a great performance too	LCD	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	6	89x96x6
B&O BeoVision Avant 55	5995	01.15/FT	★★★★★	This is one of the classiest TVs money can buy	LCD	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	6	71x129x10
LG 55EA980W	8000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great first OLED effort from LG	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	80x123x19
LG 55EC930V	2000	02.15/FT	★★★★★	OLED enters the realms of affordability, and it's a thing of beauty	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x20
<b>LG 55EG960V</b>	3800	05.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best 52-60in TV £2500+, Awards 2015</b>	OLED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	3	72x123x5
LG 55UB950V	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Not without its flaws, but this TV is good to look at, great to use	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	123x78x24
LG 55UF950V	2600	07.15/FT	★★★★★	Offers a strong 4K performance and WebOS 2.0 is fantastic	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x5
LG 65UF850V	2500	06.15/GT	★★★★★	A solid 4K performer that's well worth consideration	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	3	90x145x28
Panasonic TX-58AX802B	2499	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A 4K TV worth investigating	LED	58	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	80x130x29
Panasonic TX-65AX902B	5000	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A gorgeous screen but that price is a sticking point	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	86x146x6
Panasonic TX-P65WT600	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable set that handles 4K footage very well	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	86x147x6
Samsung KE55S9C	7000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An excellent first step for large screen OLED TVs	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	78x142x14
Samsung UE55HU7500	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 52-60in TV, Awards 2014	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x27
<b>Samsung UE55JS8500</b>	2100	07.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best 52-60in TV under £2500, Awards 2015</b>	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x9

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## X9005C

## Ultra Slim 4K UHD Android TV

At just 4.9mm thin the X90 is truly 'like no other', it's the world's slimmest LED TV. The new design allows flush wall mounting, making the TV appear to 'float', combine this with Sony's unique picture technologies and you have a truly breath taking viewing experience. The X90 includes the new Android platform, you will get all the personalisation, intelligence and entertainment of your smartphone, on the big screen. Streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon will be available, both offer a variety of 4K programs so you can experience your Sony 4K TV at its best.

55" KD-55X9005C  
65" KD-65X9005C

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## TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>£2000 and above</b>													
Samsung UE65F9000	5000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented set with few weaknesses to speak of	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	84x146x4
Samsung UE65H8000	3300	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine set, but high price and lack of 4K knock it down a star	LED	65	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	89x145x31
Samsung UE65HU7500	3500	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Best 60in+ TV, Awards 2014	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	88x145x30
Samsung UE65HU8500	3800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A feature-laden TV, this is an impressive, attractive and entertaining TV	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	85x145x11
Samsung UE65JS8500	3000	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best 60in+ TV, Awards 2015</b>	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	90x145x10
Samsung UE65JS9500	5800	11.15/FT	★★★★★	If you have the cash, this Samsung is well worth every penny	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	92x145x13
Samsung UE65JU7000	2750	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Impressive. Samsung's 2015 4K range is off to a flying start	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	90x146x30
Sony KD-55X8505B	2100	09.14/GT	★★★★★	An attractive TV with a good set of features	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	79x123x29
Sony KD-65X8505C	2700	09.15/FT	★★★★★	While it's not perfect, this is a creditable attempt at affordable 4K	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	124x76x23
Sony KD-65S9005B	3900	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Thoughtful design married with seriously good picture quality	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	155x90x33
Sony KD-65X9005A	5000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Good looks and great sound but needs 4K material to shine	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	90x168x10
Sony KD-65X9005B	3600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	This Sony set has issues with upscaled content but it looks great with 4K	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	88x172x10



## Blu-ray players

- Smart ability** Extends the viewing choice beyond discs with apps like BBC iPlayer
- Multichannel out** Analogue outputs that feed high quality sound to a non-HDMI receiver
- Twin HDMI outputs** These are used if you have two displays, say a projector and a TV

## The shortlist


**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Panasonic DMP-BDT370**

Awards 2015: Best Blu-ray player under £150


**AWARD WINNER**  
**Sony BDP-S7200**

Awards 2015: Best Blu-ray player £150-£300


**AWARD WINNER**  
**Cambridge CXU**

Awards 2015: Best Blu-ray player £300+

## Also consider

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## BLU-RAY PLAYERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
<b>£500 and above</b>								
Cambridge Audio Azur 752BD	800	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Features and functions combine in fine style, but audio performance could be a little better				2 1 1 8ch 9x43x31
Cambridge CXU	1000	10.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2015</b>				2 1 1 8ch 8x43x31
Marantz UD7007	500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	With the right system, this is Blu-ray heaven				1 1 1 No 11x44x31
Oppo BDP-105D	1100	03.15/GT	★★★★★	If you want a Blu-ray player that does everything, then this is it				2 1 1 8ch 12x43x31
Onkyo BD-SP809	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	A fine choice, but not an all-rounder				2 1 1 No 10x43x31
Panasonic DMP-BDT700	500	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2014				2 1 1 7ch 7x45x26
Pioneer BDP-LX58	600	04.15/FT	★★★★★	You won't find many 'smarts' here but in terms of performance, this is a fine player				2 0 1 No 12x43x39
Pioneer BDP-LX88	1300	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Great with movies, lacks the same quality in its stereo performance				2 1 1 No 13x44x34



## Projectors

**Screens** Buy one of these. A painted white wall is simply not good enough  
**Noise** Fan noise can be a major issue if you sit close to your projector  
**Lamp life** Projector bulbs have limited lifespans and need to be changed regularly

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Throw Ratio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (lumens)	HDMI in	DVI in	PC in	Component in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
<b>Up to £1000</b>													
BenQ W1070+	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	For a first home cinema, this would be a great projector				DLP	1.15-1.5	1920x1080	2200	2 0 1 1	10x31x24 2.75
Epson EH-TW5200	700	11.14/GT	★★★★★	For £700 it's an impressive projector with a few niggles				DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2 0 1 0	10.5x30x25 3
InFocus IN3118HD	990	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but a bright and capable projector				DLP	1.6-1.92	1920x1080	3600	2 0 1 0	10x34x25 3.7
InFocus IN8606HD	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Good detail and punch, but rivals have the edge over it				DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2 0 1 1	26x28.5x12 3
Optoma HD25	800	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of features for a budget level projector				DLP	1.5-1.8	1920x1080	2000	2 0 2 2	12x38x31 4.5

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## PROJECTORS continued

PROJECTORScontinued														
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Throw Ratio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (lumens)	HDMI in	DVI in	PC in	Component in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
£1000-£3000														
BenQ W1080ST+	850	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Best projector under £1000, Awards 2015	DLP	0.69-0.83	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	3
BenQ W1400	1000	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best projector up to £1500, Awards 2014	DLP	1.07-1.71	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x34x28	4
BenQ W1500	1400	04.15/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped projector that boasts a decent performance	DLP	1.07-1.71	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x34x28	3.9
Epson EH-TW6100W	1600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	LCD	1.32-2.15:1	1920x1080	2300	2	0	1	1	14x42x37	6
Epson EH-TW6600	1400	04.15/GT	★★★★★	Lacks wireless connectivity but this Epson is a great performer	LCD	1.32-2.15	1920x1080	2500	2	0	1	1	16x41x30	6.7
Epson EH-TW7200	1900	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1000-£2000, Awards 2015. Product of the Year	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	16x47x40	8
Optoma HD50	1000	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Not perfect but the HD50's rich, colourful approach is appealing	DLP	1.39-2.09:1	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x29x27	4
Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV	1500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A great idea but the lack of Full HD is an obstacle	DLP	0.321	1280x800	500	3	0	1	0	15x34x29	5
Sony VPL-HW55ES	2800	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2015	SKRD	n/a	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
£3000 and above														
Epson EH-LS10000	6000	08.15/GT	★★★★★	An impressive projector though it doesn't play native 4K	3LCD	1.28-2.73	1920x1080	1500	2	0	1	3	22x55x55	18
Epson EH-TW9200W	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine projector, but not the showstopper we expected	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2400	6	0	0	1	14x47x40	9
Panasonic PT-AT6000E	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2013	LCD	1.18-2.36	1920x1080	2400	3	0	1	1	15x47x36	8.7
Sony VPL-HW50ES	3000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Shows why home cinema can't be beaten	SKRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW500ES	8500	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Stunningly good with 4K content but pricey nonetheless	SKRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW300ES	6000	08.15/GT	★★★★★	A high asking price but it's worth it for this level of quality	LCD	n/a	4096x2160	1500	2	0	0	0	20x50x46	14



## AV receivers &amp; amplifiers

Up to £500

£500-£1000

£1000+

Well-equipped and delivers convincing surround sound

There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance

Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

## The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Yamaha RX-V379**

Awards 2015: Best home cinema amp under £350



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Denon AVR-X2200W**

Awards 2015: Best home cinema amp £350-£700



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Yamaha RX-A850**

Awards 2015: Best home cinema amp £700-£1000

## Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels /power(w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £300</b>									
Pioneer VSX-528	285	02.14/GT	★★★★★	5x130	6	1	●	●	17x44x33
Yamaha RX-V377	250	07.14/FT	★★★★★	5x70	4	1	●	●	15x44x32
<b>£300-£500</b>									
Onkyo TX-NR545	450	09.15/GT	★★★★★	7x120	6	1	●	●	17x44x33
Pioneer VSX-930	500	09.15/GT	★★★★★	7x150	7	2	●	●	17x44x36
Sony STR-DN850	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	7x150	5	1	●	●	16x43x33
Sony STR-DN860	400	09.15/GT	★★★★★	7x95	5	1	●	●	16x43x33
Yamaha RX-V379	300	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	5x70	4	1	●	●	15x44x32
<b>£500-£1000</b>									
Denon AVR-X2100W	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	7x150	8	2	●	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X2200W	500	10.15/GT	★★★★★	7x95	8	2	●	●	17x43x34
Denon AVR-X4000	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	7x125	7	3	●	●	17x43x38
Onkyo TX-NR626	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	7x160	6	2	●	●	17x44x33
Pioneer VSX-924	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	7x150	7	2	●	●	17x44x36
Sony STR-DN1050	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	7x165	6	3	●	●	17x43x33
Sony STR-DN1060	500	10.15/GT	★★★★★	7x100	6	2	●	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-A850	900	11.15/GT	★★★★★	7x100	8	2	●	●	17x44x38

## AV RECEIVERS &amp; AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Channels / power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Yamaha RX-S600	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	No Atmos unlike its rivals, this receiver still offers plenty to interest	5x90	5	1	●	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-V677	560	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A fun receiver that's not the most balanced, but is endlessly entertaining	7x150	6	1	●	●	17x43x36
Yamaha RX-V679	600	10.15/GT	★★★★★	One of the better, more affordable receivers we've heard from Yamaha for some time	7x90	6	1	●	●	17x44x38

## £1000-£2000

Anthem MRX-510	1700	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Rarely have we seen a multi-channel amp so accomplished with music	7x75	7	2	●	●	16x44x37
Onkyo TX-NR838	1000	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A commendable amplifier with a huge number of features	7x180	7	1	●	●	34x58x51
Pioneer SC-LX58	1400	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2014	9x190	8	3	●	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX59	1400	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best home cinema amp £1000+, Awards 2015</b>	9x140	8	3	●	●	19x44x44
Yamaha RX-A1040	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Well-featured and full of power, but lacks in the thrill department	7x110	8	2	●	●	18x44x43

## £2000 and above

Anthem MRX 700	2100	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic-sounding and worthy of a serious audition	7x90	4	1	●	●	17x44x39
Arcam FMJ AVR450	2200	03.14/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	●	●	17x43x42
Arcam AVR750	4000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	It's not flawless, but this AV receiver is very good	7x100	7	2	●	●	17x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	●	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX88	2200	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A staggeringly powerful amp with a captivating sound	9x250	8	3	●	●	19x44x44
Onkyo TX-NR3010	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	●	20x44x60
Onkyo TX-NR3030	2500	06.15/FT	★★★★★	A stonkingly good receiver that offers plenty for the asking price	11x185	8	3	●	●	34x60x59
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-A3040	2000	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and powerful amp, that's well worth auditioning	9x230	8	2	●	●	19x44x47



## Subwoofers

Sealed cabinet \_\_\_\_\_ Tends to produce the tightest bass but limits outright quantity  
 Reflex port \_\_\_\_\_ A more common design that tends to deliver more bass  
 Room equalisation \_\_\_\_\_ Evens out the subwoofer's response to produce a more balanced sound

## Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Power (w)	Driver (cm)	Passive radiator	Sealed	Ported	Drive unit orientation	Line inputs	Speaker ins	Line outputs	Speaker outs	Phase invert	Remote control	EQ	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict																
Up to £500																			
B&WASW610	450	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer up to £700, Awards 2011	200	25	●		Forward	1	1				●	●	4		31x31x38
Monitor Audio Vector VW-8	225	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Capable little sub for an entry-level system	100	20		●	Forward	2	0				●			2	32x28x28
RELAcoustics T-Zero	350	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Small and discreet, but limited by size	100	16.5		●	Downward	2	1				●			2	24x22x26
TannoyTS2.10	430	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but packs a ferocious punch	300	25	●		Forward	1	0	●			●			3	39x38x33
Velodyne EQ-Max 8	495	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but punches well above its weight	180	20		●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	37x33x38
Velodyne Impact-12	365	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine sub, more of a movie than a music classic	165	30		●	Forward	2	1			●	●			1	39x66x45
Velodyne Impact-Mini	435	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Amazingly small sub with fine movie performance	180	16.5	●		Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●			1	25x25x30
W'fedale Powercube SPC-10	300	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Nearly a terrific subwoofer - but there are issues	215	25	●		Downward	1	1	●			●			8	38x35x31

## £500-£1000

B&W ASW610XP	700	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for big bass from a small box	500	25	●	●	●	Forward	2	1	●	●	●	4	32x32x37
Monitor Audio Apex AW-12	950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Beautiful to look at, and punchy too	500	30.5	●	●	●	Forward	1	0	●	●	●	2	34x34x41
RELAcoustics T-7	650	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact sub with authority	200	20	●	●	●	Downward	2	1	●	●	●	2	30x35x33
Sonos Sub	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Sounds great. Makes sense with Sonos Play speakers	n/a	n/a	●	●	●	Inward	0	0	●	●	●	1	40x38x16
Tannoy TS2.12	549	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Attractively priced with decent sonics too	500	30.5	●	●	●	Forward	1	0	●	●	●	2	44x43x38
Velodyne EQ-Max 12	825	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and agile and supremely enjoyable	225	30.5	●	●	●	Forward	1	2	●	●	●	1	45x42x46

## £1000 and above

B&W PV1D	1200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Delivers precision and agility in spades	400	20	●	●	●	Forward	1	0	●	●	●	2	34x27x36
Jamo D600	1300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant sub that's worth the price	400	38	●	●	●	Forward	n/a	0	●	●	●	1	56x59x50
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra	1400	09.11/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best subwoofer £700+, Awards 2011</b>	1200	25	●	●	●	Forward	1	1	●	●	●	3	34x33x34

"Most of its rivals can go loud and deep, but the B&W's ASW610's edge lies in its lethally effective blend of power and poise, muscle and musicality"

Best subwoofer up to £300, Awards 2011



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Amp and CD player also available in silver.  
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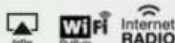
### CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CXN NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER

What Hi-Fi? magazine described the CXN as, "a stylish, feature-packed streamer that sounds great and is a joy to use." They also said that, "those in the market for a streamer should really give this one a listen – and be prepared to put it at the top of their wishlist."

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**AKG Y50**  
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"Excelling in sound and style, the Y50s are a cracking introduction to AKG's latest range."  
– What Hi-Fi?

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**SHURE SRH1540**  
HEADPHONES

"Heads up for a real treat - if you want to enjoy great sound in pampering comfort all day long, give these a go."  
– What Hi-Fi?  
TSP £429.95

**£369.95**



**ASTELL & KERN**  
**JUNIOR**  
HI-RES PORTABLE AUDIO PLAYER

"An audio treat. Just add headphones for ultimate portable pleasure."  
– What Hi-Fi?

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## TVs

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**PANASONIC VIERA TX50CS520B**  
50" SMART LED TV

"Overall, this is a stunning picture, and the sound is good too." – What Hi-Fi?

**CALL OR  
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**PANASONIC TX50CX802B**  
50" 4K ULTRA HD SMART  
3D LED TV

"Impressive in everything from sound to picture, interface to features, this is a solid package," said What Hi-Fi?. AV Forums also added that it is, "right up there with the best available right now at its price-point."

TSP £1799 | Also available 40", 55" & 65"

**£1499**



**PANASONIC VIERA TX40CX680B**  
40" 4K ULTRA HD SMART LED TV

"Good value set that flies the flag for 4K, offering a fine picture and good stack of features with it." – What Hi-Fi?  
Also available 50" & 55"

**CALL OR  
SEE WEB**



**SAMSUNG UE55JS8500**  
55" CURVED 4K ULTRA  
HD SMART 3D LED TV

"Overall, it is a dream to use. Both fantastic to watch and enjoyable to listen to, it is a beauty to behold," said What Hi-Fi? of this impressive TV. Its curved SUHD screen will deliver a deeper, clearer and wider viewing experience for your movies.

TSP £2099  
Also available 48" & 65"

**£1899**



**SAMSUNG UE48JU7000**  
48" 4K ULTRA HD SMART 3D LED TV

"The Samsung UE48JU7000 is a strong all-rounder, and does plenty right in every department." – What Hi-Fi?  
TSP £1249 | Also available 40"

**£1199**



**SONY BRAVIA KD55X9005CBU**  
55" 4K ULTRA HD SMART 3D LED TV

Enjoy detailed picture quality on a phenomenally thin screen, plus a host of apps from Android's Smart interface.  
Also available 65"

**CALL OR  
SEE WEB**



**PANASONIC TX65CZ950B**  
65" CURVED 4K ULTRA HD SMART 3D OLED TV

Panasonic's amazing new OLED screen delivers pictures that are more natural and inviting than ever before.

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Chris, Deputy Manager,  
Leeds store, 11th year of service

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REGULAR PRICE **£499.95**  
**VIP CLUB PRICE £469**

**SAVE £150**

**BENQ W1400 3D PROJECTOR**

"Big-screen entertainment for a great price." – What Hi-Fi?  
TSP £999.95

REGULAR PRICE **£899.95**  
**VIP CLUB PRICE £849.95**

**SAVE £100**

**EPSON EH-TW7200**  
3D PROJECTOR

"Exciting, immersive and effortless." – What Hi-Fi?  
TSP £1899

**£1799.95**

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**SONY VPL-HW55**  
SXRD 3D PROJECTOR

"Nothing short of stunning." – What Hi-Fi?  
TSP £2799

**£2499**

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**SONY VPL-VW300ES**  
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3D PROJECTOR

"At this level, you won't find many that pay more attention to detail." – What Hi-Fi?

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Bluetooth

REGULAR PRICE

**£289**

VIP CLUB PRICE

**£249**



## SONY STRDN860 HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER

"Sony has once again produced a stellar budget amp that offers a huge performance at an excellent price." – What Hi-Fi?

6 year Supercare only £39.90

4K ULTRA-HD UPSCALING

Hi-Res AUDIO

AirPlay

Bluetooth

**£399.95**



## YAMAHA RXV679 HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER

"This is a big, muscular amp that throws itself behind an action-packed soundtrack without second thought."

– What Hi-Fi?  
TSP £599.95 | 6 year Supercare only 10% of purchase price

4K ULTRA-HD UPSCALING

AirPlay

Bluetooth

WiFi

REGULAR PRICE

**£549**

VIP CLUB PRICE

**£499**



## DENON AVR-X2200W HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER

"An articulate, detailed amp with stacks of functionality and future-proofing." – What Hi-Fi?  
Optimised for Dolby Atmos, you can experience a multi-dimensional and totally immersive cinematic sound in your own home.

It's also fully equipped with a wide range of connectivity features including Airplay and Bluetooth for streaming your music.

6 year Supercare only £49.95

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
★★★★★

DOLBY  
ATMOS

4K ULTRA-HD  
UPSCALING

DTS  
X

AirPlay

WiFi  
BLUETOOTH

**£499**



## ONKYO TXNR646 HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER

This sensational amplifier packs in the latest generation of surround sound technology, including Dolby Atmos and DTS:X.

6 year Supercare only £54.90

DOLBY  
ATMOS

DTS  
X

AirPlay

Bluetooth

WiFi

**£549**

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SOUND AND VISION  
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6 year Supercare only £89.95

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## PIONEER SCLX59 HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER

Following in the footsteps of a previous award-winner, this amplifier will offer even more immersive sound.

6 year Supercare only £139.90

4K ULTRA-HD UPSCALING

DOLBY  
ATMOS

WiFi

**£1399**

SAVE  
**£445**

DOLBY  
ATMOS

THX  
CERTIFIED

4K ULTRA-HD  
UPSCALING

WiFi

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
★★★★★

TRUSTED  
BY THE EDITORS



## ONKYO TXNR3030 & KEF 5.1.4 SYSTEM HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER & 5.1.4 ATMOS SPEAKER PACKAGE

"An outstanding Dolby Atmos-equipped AV receiver... with a killer feature list and enthralling sound quality," said trustedreviews.com of the Onkyo, while the KEF speakers add legendary performance.

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**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014** ★★★★★

**SONY BDP56200**  
SMART 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

4K ULTRA HD UPSCALING 8 DUAL CORE WiFi

REGULAR PRICE **£119.95**  
VIP CLUB PRICE **£99.95**

"Sony has done it again, with a talented player that should be on your shortlist."  
– What Hi-Fi?

6 year Supercare only 10% of purchase price

**SAVE £20**

**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014** ★★★★★

**SONY BDP57200**  
SMART 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

4K ULTRA HD UPSCALING 8 DUAL CORE WiFi

REGULAR PRICE **£179**

"Serves up a classy picture and stunning sound."  
– What Hi-Fi?

TSP £199 | 6 year Supercare only £17.90

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**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014** ★★★★★

**PANASONIC DMPBDT700**  
SMART 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

4K ULTRA HD UPSCALING WiFi

REGULAR PRICE **£399**

"A premium Blu-ray player for a premium home cinema system."  
– What Hi-Fi?

TSP £449 | 6 year Supercare only £39.90

**SAVE £50**

**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014** ★★★★★

**TANNOY HTS101**  
5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

REGULAR PRICE **£319**  
VIP CLUB PRICE **£299**

"Perfectly formed, with an open sound and good integration."  
– What Hi-Fi?

TSP £349.95 | 6 year Supercare only 10% of purchase price

**SAVE £50**

**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014** ★★★★★

**PHILIPS HTL5140**  
TV SOUNDBAR

Bluetooth

REGULAR PRICE **£199.95**

"Balanced, dynamic and well-integrated, the HTL5140 runs rings around its rivals."  
– What Hi-Fi?

TSP £249.95 | 6 year Supercare only £19.95

**SAVE £70**

**Bluetooth**

**Q ACOUSTICS M4**  
TV SOUNDBAR

REGULAR PRICE **£329.95**

"Sensibly priced and sounds fantastic."  
– What Hi-Fi?

TSP £399 | 6 year Supercare only £32.95

**LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED**

**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014** ★★★★★

**Q ACOUSTICS 2000i**  
5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

REGULAR PRICE **£499.95**

"A must-hear for anyone who wants an attractive and affordable 5.1 system that works as well with music as it does with home cinema."  
– What Hi-Fi?

6 year Supercare only £49.95

**LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED**

**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014** ★★★★★

**YAMAHA YSP2500**  
TV SOUNDBAR

Bluetooth

REGULAR PRICE **£599**

"This is an amazingly talented soundbar delivering captivating sound."  
– What Hi-Fi?

6 year Supercare only 10% of purchase price

**CALL OR SEE WEB**

**LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED**

**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014** ★★★★★

**DENON HEOS HOMECINEMA**  
TV SOUNDBAR

WiFi

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<b>Bournemouth</b> 0333 900 0058	<b>Eton</b> 0333 900 0087	<b>Leeds</b> 0333 900 0025	<b>London Chiswick</b> 0333 900 0055	<b>Manchester</b> 0333 900 0086	<b>Oxford</b> 0333 900 0052	<b>Sheffield</b> 0333 900 0034	<b>Weybridge</b> 0333 900 0083
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## Surround speakers

**Full size** Traditional cabinet design that's big but can deliver a great sound  
**Style** Compact speakers that make a lot of sense in smaller living spaces  
**Bipole/Dipole** Surround speaker designs that give a more cohesive soundfield

### The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Tannoy HTS-101 XP**

Awards 2015: Best style package £1000+



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Monitor Audio Bronze AV5**

Awards 2015: Best traditional pack £1000-£2000



**AWARD WINNER**  
**KEF R100 5.1**

Awards 2015: Best traditional package £2000+

### Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
<b>Up to £500</b>								
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	220	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Just as good as its predecessor: a must-hear	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40 2
Canton Movie 130	450	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Likeable and listenable	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42 3
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	400	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Gets a lot right for this kind of money	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32 2
<b>£500-£1000</b>								
Dali Zensor 1 5.1	980	07.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best traditional package under £1000, Awards 2015</b>	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31 3
Jamo A 200 HCS 5	640	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Agutsy and entertaining sound at this price	22x9x5	22x9x5	22x9x5	31x28x31 7
KEF E305	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A room-filling system but there are more dynamic packages out there	26x14x16	16x22x15	26x14x16	32x43x27 2
Mission M <sup>3</sup>	700	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Petite, likable and convenient, just lacks the thrills of rival packages	9x9x9	9x9x9	9x9x9	28x27x27 1
Mission MX15.1	600	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a medium sized room	28x17x26	15x42x19	28x17x26	30x30x33 4
Monitor Audio MASS	800	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Still an excellent system, it narrowly falls short of the best	22x13x13	13x22x13	22x13x13	42x38x38 1
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1	625	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package up to £700, Awards 2014	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12 2
Q Acoustics 3000 Series 5.1	700	07.15/GT	★★★★★	Q Acoustics punches well above its weight. Another excellent budget offering	24x15x20	15x43x20	24x15x20	40x20x43 5
Q Acoustics Q7000i	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £700-£1000, Awards 2014	24x10x16	12x20x16	24x10x16	32x46x20 2
Tannoy HTS-101 XP	600	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best style package under £1000, Awards 2015</b>	19x10x11	19x10x11	19x10x11	32x32x27 1
Wharfedale 100-HCP	950	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A very good package, but could do with a better centre speaker	32x17x26	17x47x27	32x17x26	39x35x31 7
Wharfedale Diamond 220 HCP	850	07.15/GT	★★★★★	Wharfedale opts for a more measured approach and succeeds impressively	32x18x26	19x47x26	32x17x27	38x35x31 4
<b>£1000-£2000</b>								
Acoustic Energy 1 Series 5.101	1000	07.15/GT	★★★★★	Produces a big, punchy and refined sound. An all-rounder worth investigating	30x19x25	19x45x26	30x19x25	28x28x28 2
B&W MT-50	1100	11.13/ST	★★★★★	<b>Best style package £1000+, Awards 2015</b>	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	26x26x33 2
B&W MT-60D	1950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1800+, Awards 2014	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	34x27x36 2
Cabasse Eole 3	1000	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A likable, big-sounding system that lacks a little authority	13x13x13	13x13x13	13x13x13	33x33x35 2
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1	1650	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1500-£2500, Awards 2014	98x24x34	15x43x21	18x46x15	34x33x36 2
Dali Fazon 3 5.1	1699	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1200-£2000, Awards 2011	26x14x14	14x26x14	26x14x14	23x16x12 2
Dali Zensor 5 5.1	1499	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2012	84x16x27	16x44x28	97x16x23	34x37x38 2
Elipson Planet M 5.1	1300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Enjoyable looks and sound, just lacking a smidge of detail	15x15x15	15x15x15	15x15x15	39x32x32 3
Focal Dome 5.1	1000	11.13/ST	★★★★★	It's not perfect but this Focal charms nonetheless	17x14x14	17x14x14	17x14x14	40x28x28 3
JBL Arena 5.1	1080	10.15/FT	★★★★★	A hugely entertaining system that's a touch unrefined	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a n/a
Monitor Audio Bronze AV5	1500	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best traditional package £1000-£2000, Awards 2015. Product of the Year</b>	90x22x28	17x46x19	27x28x12	36x32x36 4
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1	1500	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best style package £1400-£1800, Awards 2014	20x13x14	17x46x17	20x13x14	33x32x33 3
Quad L-ite Plus 5.1 package	1200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine package that's up against some formidable rivals at this price	25x14x18	15x38x17	25x14x18	31x24x24 3
<b>£2000 and above</b>								
Acoustic Energy 3-Series 5.1	2425	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Build, looks and performance combine for an attractive speaker package	90x19x30	19x45x26	30x19x25	36x36x36 2
B&W 683 Theatre	2750	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented and entertaining speaker package that doesn't quite captivate	99x19x36	22x59x30	31.5x16x23	33x33x38 2
Dali Ikon 5 MK2	2500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	An exciting speaker package that will thrill film and music fans	81x15x28	15x57x26	38x27x15	45x41x46 2
KEF R100 5.1	2850	06.14/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best traditional package £2000+, Awards 2015</b>	28x18x29	17x53x31	28x18x29	37x33x35 4
Monitor Audio Apex	2400	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style speaker package £2000+, Awards 2011	25x14x14	14x61x10	25x14x14	34x34x41 2
Monitor Audio Silver 6 AV12	2875	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely capable surround package. Worthy of serious consideration	94x35x20	19x50x24	25x31x12	23x16x14 6
Tannoy Revolution SEAV	2400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Despite a few issues with the centre and sub, this is an exciting package	95x20x25	15x31x16	37x20x25	44x43x37 1

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## CD players

**Integrated** \_\_\_\_\_ Has both a CD mechanism and digital-to-analogue conversion tech  
**Transport** \_\_\_\_\_ Needs an outboard DAC but can deliver a higher standard of sound

### The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**

**Cambridge CXC**

Awards 2015: Best CD transport under £500



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

**Cyrus CDi**

Awards 2015: Best CD player £500+



**NEW ENTRY**

**AWARD WINNER**

**Cyrus CDt**

Awards 2015: Best CD transport £500+

### Also consider

Also consider					Integrated Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XLR out	RCA out	Headphone out	Co-axial in	Optical in	AES/EBU in	USB in	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	
Product	£	Tested	Verdict														
Up to £500																	
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy rival to the Award-winning Marantz CD6004	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31	
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	A spacious sounding disc spinner	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31	
Cambridge CXC	300	09.15/FT	★★★★★	Best CD transport under £500, Awards 2015	●	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31	
Marantz CD6005	280	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player under £500, Awards 2015	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34	
Mitchell & Johnson CDD-201V	250	07.15/FT	★★★★★	A re-modelled Sansui that looks smart and delivers a crisp, clean sound	●	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x29	
Onkyo C-N7050	350	04.15/FT	★★★★★	Is it a CD player or a high-res streamer? Regardless, it's hugely appealing	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	10x44x30	
Teac CD-P800NT	350	06.15/FT	★★★★★	A versatile one-box solution that offers impressive sound and features	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	10x43x30	
£500-£1000																	
Arcam CDS27	800	09.15/FT	★★★★★	An all-in-one CD player/streamer that could use some more excitement	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x28	
Audiolab 8200CD	800	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1000, Awards 2012	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30	
Audiolab 8200CDQ	950	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Improves on the sky-high performance of the 8200CD	●	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	2	8x44x30	
NAD C 546BEE	500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Talented but struggles against the more enjoyable budget Marantz	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9x44x31	
Cyrus CD Transport	750	01.12/ST	★★★★★	An impressive and affordable CD transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36	
Cyrus CD6 SE2	700	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	8x22x36	
Cyrus CD t	750	11.15/FT	★★★★★	Best CD transport £500+, Awards 2015	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36	
Naim CD5si	995	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2013	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30	
Pioneer PD-50	500	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering but this SACD player doesn't quite engage	●	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	13x44x33	
Rega Apollo-R	550	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Admirable, but lacks some cohesion	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x22x32	
Roksan Kandy K2	900	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and powerful, with an entertaining sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38	
£1000 and above																	
Audiolab 8300CD	1000	10.15/FT	★★★★★	A polished performer that doesn't quite match its predecessor's highs	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	8x44x32	
Audio Research CD6	8050	08.14/FT	★★★★★	In the market for a top-class CD player? This could be the one	●	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	13x48x31	
Burmester 069	35840	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy	●	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	16x45x34	
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34	
Copland CDA 825	4298	05.13/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable player with stunning sound quality	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	10x43x39	
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36	
Cyrus CD i	1050	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500+, Awards 2015. Product of the Year	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36	
Cyrus CD Xt Signature	1750	05.15/FT	★★★★★	Partner the Xt with a suitable DAC and you have a top-class transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36	
Esoteric K-05	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great place to start... if you're looking for your final disc-player	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x45x36	
Leema Antila IIS Eco	2995	09.11/FT	★★★★★	The already good Antila goes up another level in performance	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x31	
Roksan K3 CD Di	1300	11.15/FT	★★★★★	A CD player you'll never tire of listening to	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	3	8x43x11	
Musical Fidelity M6CD	2100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Its powerful, yet refined sound will appeal to many, a fine performer	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x44x39	
Naim CD555/555PS	18345	10.09/FT	★★★★★	The CD555/555PS has a hefty price tag, but a classy performance	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x31	
Naim CDX2	3640	02.10/FT	★★★★★	The tweaked CDX2 remains a fine proposition	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31	
Parasound Halo CD1	5000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap but it's a fine CD player with an idiosyncratic design	●	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x35	
Primare CD32	2200	04.11/FT	★★★★★	It's massively detailed, but not as engaging as we'd like	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38	
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	1695	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1500+ Awards 2014	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33	
T+A MP 3000 HV	7900	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A classy multi-source player that delivers high-quality sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	11x43x35
Yamaha CD-S3000	3500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	An understated player that lets the music take centre stage	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	14x44x44	



## DACs

Digital-to-analogue converters take a digital data stream from their source (such as a computer or CD transport) and turns it into an analogue signal that your amplifier can work with. These devices have become more popular in recent years due to the emergence of computer-based audio

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (wxd, cm)
<b>Up to £500</b>														
Arcam airDAC	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Not as good as the irDAC but delivers good sound on a budget	0	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x19x12
Arcam irDAC	400	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £300-£500, Awards 2014	0	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x12x19
Arcam irDAC Wireless	380	09.12/GT	★★★★★	No longer the default choice at the money, still very much a contender	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam miniBlink	90	05.14/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best Bluetooth receiver, Awards 2015</b>	0	0	0	10	0	●	0	1	0	2.5x3x4
Arcam rPAC	150	04.13/ST	★★★★★	More desirable alternatives, but the rPAC still has plenty of merit	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	1	0	3x10x6
Audioquest DragonFly v1.2	130	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2014	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	6x2x1
Belkin Song Stream BT HD	50	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer for the price	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	An affordable, fine looking and listenable DAC	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	350	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better sound and features than the original - but pricey	1	2	2	0	0	●	1	1	1	5x22x19
Camb. Audio DacMagic XS	100	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Drops down a star but still a delightful little device	0	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	5x3x1
Chord Mojo	400	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC £400-£800, Awards 2015. Product of the Year</b>	1	1	1	0	0	●	2	0	0	2x6x8
Crystal Acoustics BluDAC	60	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Doesn't quite have the finesse of others but this is still a real entertainer	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	6.5x7.5x2
Denon DA-300USB	330	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Soft bass detracts from what is otherwise a great first DAC from Denon	1	2	1	0	0	●	1	1	0	6x17x18
Furutech ADL GT 40	400	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Cables & Accessories, Awards 2011	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	1	0	6x15x11
Focal Universal Wireless Receiv.	85	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A very talented performer that comes with a few quirks	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
LH Labs Geek Out	200	09.14/FT	★★★★★	A clever little device that's a solid performer	0	0	0	0	0	●	2	0	0	1.3x3.5x6.7
Meridian Explorer DAC	250	07.13/GT	★★★★★	The Explorer's design and assured sonic performance makes it a top contender	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity V-90 DAC	200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A well-featured DAC that's a little too relaxed in its sound	1	2	1	0	0	●	0	0	0	5x17x10
NAD D 1050	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For those looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D 1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0	●	1	1	1	19x6x21
Oppo HA-2	250	10.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC under £400, Awards 2015</b>	1	1	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	16x7x1
Pro-Ject DAC Box DS	299	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer but doesn't excel in any area	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	7x10x14
<b>£500-£1000</b>														
Audiolab M-DAC	600	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £500-£700, Awards 2014	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	6x25x25
Cambridge Audio Azur 851D	1000	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine DAC, even if it can't scale the heights of the class leaders	1	4	3	1	0	●	1	0	1	12x43x36
Chord 2Qute	1000	08.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC £800-£1200, Awards 2015</b>	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	7x16x4
Chord Chordette QuteHD	990	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2013	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	7x16x4
Chord Electronics Qute Ex	990	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2014	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	7x16x4
Rega DAC	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Beefy build; natural, unforced, dynamic and detailed sound	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	0	8x22x27
Musical Fidelity M1 SDAC	800	08.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive spec list but performance is trumped by cheaper rivals	1	1	2	0	0	●	1	1	0	10x22x31
Parasound Zdac	500	11.13/GT	★★★★★	The Zdac produces a lively, likable sound	1	1	1	0	0	●	1	1	1	5x22x26
Pathos Convento	675	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Offers an engaging performance. Could do with a little more drive	1	1	2	0	0	●	1	1	1	6x20x23
Pioneer U-05	700	06.15/GT	★★★★★	The kind of DAC that gets your toes tapping	1	2	2	1	0	●	3	1	1	10x30x27
Rotel RDD-1580	600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to be impressed with, but the poor quality of its USB input holds it back	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	5.5x43x32
Sony PHA-3AC	720	06.15/GT	★★★★★	A fine performer with plenty of strengths but more than a few weaknesses	2	1	0	0	0	●	2	1	0	7x8x14
Sony UDA-1	500	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not the most musically exciting DAC, but an excellent choice for desktop users	2	1	0	0	0	●	2	1	0	3x18x14
<b>£1000 and above</b>														
Aesthetix Romulus	6500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine performer that draws in the listener with a smooth and elegant sound	1	1	1	1	0	●	0	1	1	11x46x45
Antelope Zodiac Gold/Voltikus	3100	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Unique and appealing, it just misses out on a fifth star	1	2	2	0	0	●	2	1	1	11x17x19
Antelope Zodiac Platinum	8595	06.15/FT	★★★★★	Excellent features and a rhythmic sound make for a likeable effort	1	2	2	1	0	●	2	1	1	11x17x19
Arcam FMJ D33	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped DAC, but not the best in class	3	2	2	1	0	●	0	1	2	11x43x37
Benchmark DAC HGC	1750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable DAC but there are cheaper contenders out there	1	2	2	0	0	●	1	2	1	5x20x21
Bricasti Design M1 DAC	7000	03.14/FT	★★★★★	An understated but deeply talented performer. Thoroughly impressive	1	1	2	1	1	●	0	1	1	6x43x30
Burmester 113	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Small and unassuming but packs a seriously exciting sound	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	1	6x20x17
Chord QBD76 HDSO	4995	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A top-class, visually appealing DAC that delivers brilliant sound	2	2	2	2	0	●	0	1	1	6x34x15
Chord Hugo	1400	03.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC £1200+, Awards 2015</b>	2	1	1	0	0	●	3	1	0	2x13x10
Chord Hugo TT	2995	09.15/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous, beautifully made DAC that builds on the strengths of the original Hugo	2	1	1	0	0	●	3	0	0	5x24x23
Cyrus DACXP Signature	3000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	0	2	4	0	0	●	0	2	2	8x22x37
dCS Debussy	7930	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Worth every penny of its asking price	1	0	2	2	0	●	0	1	1	7x45x39
Musical Fidelity M6 DAC	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A mighty performer but its price and competition rob it of a fifth star	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	1	13x44x39
NAD M51	1500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1200+, Awards 2012	1	1	1	1	2	●	0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2150	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Flexible, fine sounding and future-proof. The Naim is some DAC	2	3	3	0	0	●	0	1	0	7x43x30



## DACs continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES/EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>£1000 and above</b>													
Naim DAC-V1	1250	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2013				1	2	3	0	0	1 1 1 9x21x32
Oppo HA-1	1200	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Worth an audition but needs to deliver more energy to compete with the best				2	1	1	1	0	1 1 1 8x25x33
TAD DA1000	11995	05.15/FT	★★★★★	An exceptional DAC				1	1	4	1	0	1 1 1 9x27x27
T+A DAC 8	1250	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully engineered with a great sound to boot				1	1	4	1	0	1 1 1 9x27x27



## Turntables

**Turntable** The main part of the player that actually spins the record  
**Tonearm** The component that carries the cartridge across the record surface  
**Cartridge** Turns the information in the record groove into sound

## Our recommendations

Our recommendations					33.33	45	78	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict												
Up to £1000															
Audio Technica AT-LP1240USB	500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A competent turntable than could do with more subtlety sound-wise	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	16x45x35
NAD C 556	250	09.15/GT	★★★★★	Similar to Rega's RP1, but worthy of an audition	●	●			●		●	●		3	9x43x30
Pro-Ject Elemental	150	04.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class budget deck from Pro-Ject	●	●			●		●	●		3	9x43x30
Pro-Ject Essential II	210	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable under £400, Awards 2015	●	●			●		●			3	14x46x36
Pro-Ject Essential II Digital	310	09.15/GT	★★★★★	Offers tweaks to an Award-winner and the results are... mostly good	●	●			●	●	●	●		2	11x42x33
Pro-Ject 1 Xpression Carbon UKX	575	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A terrific package for the price and worth serious consideration	●	●			●		●	●		1	13x42x34
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience 2-Pack	900	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An eye-catching turntable with a robust sound. A very fine effort	●	●			●		●	●		1	13x46x36
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience Basic +	600	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Fuss-free package with a strikingly clear sound	●	●			●		●	●		1	14x46x36
Pro-Ject RPM1 Carbon	325	08.15/FT	★★★★★	The RPM1 is not as composed as we'd like, but it's still worthy of consideration	●	●			●		●	●		3	11x38x35
Pro-Ject Debut Carbon	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	It's been a few years but the Carbon is still a tempting proposition	●	●	●		●		●	●		7	12x42x32
Rega RP1	225	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2011	●	●			●		●	●		3	12x45x36
Rega RP1 Performance Pack	300	09.15/GT	★★★★★	A blindingly good turntable for the price	●	●			●		●	●		4	12x45x36
Rega RP3/Elys2	550	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best turntable £400-£800, Awards 2015. Product of the Year	●	●			●		●	●		3	10x45x36
£1000 and above															
Clearaudio Concept	995	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £800+, Awards 2015	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x42x35
Clearaudio Ovation/Tali. V2 Gold	5995	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully made and a pleasure to use. A fantastic performer	●	●	●	●	●		●	●		4	14x42x35
Clearaudio Performance SE	2660	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Quality engineering and top-class sound	●	●			●		●	●		2	13x42x33
Kronos Turntable	30000	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Not perfect, but an incredibly tempting piece of kit nonetheless	●	●			●					1	28x56x36
Linn Majik LP12	2350	03.09/FT	★★★★★	The LP12 offers great value for money with no compromise	●	●			●		●	●		5	14x45x36
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience X-Pack	1000	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Precision and integration to keep it among the top players	●	●		●	●		●	●		1	14x46x39
P'Ject Xten./Ortofon RS-309D	4000	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Proves Pro-Ject can compete at all price levels	●	●	●	●	●		●			4	25x55x45
Rega RP8/Apheta	2200	12.14/FT	★★★★★	A spectacular turntable from Rega	●	●		●	●		●	●		1	12x45x36
Rega RP6/Exact	1000	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Deceptively simple looking, this Rega is one of the very best at this price	●	●		●	●		●	●		8	12x45x36
Roksan Radius 5.2	1375	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	This Roksan boasts superb performance	●	●			●		●			8	15x45x37
Thorens TD309	1250	06.10/FT	★★★★★	The TD309 is a good deck, but it's no TD160HD on the cheap	●	●		●	●		●	●		2	13x47x43
VPI Prime	3750	10.15/FT	★★★★★	Best Temptation, Awards 2015. Product of the Year	●	●			●		●			1	18x54x40



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## Radios

**DAB** Digital radio signal that now offers coverage across most of the UK  
**Internet** Allows you to listen to thousands of radio stations from around the world

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £100</b>									
Aves Air	50	09.13/GT	★★★★★						10x6x2
Pure Digital Move 2500	90	11.11/FT	★★★★★						10x6x1.5
Pure Digital Move 400D	90	11.12/GT	★★★★★						8.5x15x2.7
Pure Evoke D2	80	09.13/GT	★★★★★						15x21x7
Q2 Internet radio	90	03.11/FT	★★★★★						10x10x10
Roberts Duologic	75	01.10/GT	★★★★★						15x25x83
View Quest Retro Mini	60	10.15/FT	★★★★★						22x15x11
<b>£100 and above</b>									
Geneva World Radio DAB+	270	09.13/GT	★★★★★						18x30x12
Philips Original Radio Mini	110	09.13/GT	★★★★★						25x12x12
Pure Evoke D4 with Bluetooth	150	08.14/FT	★★★★★						18x22x12
Pure Evoke D6 with Bluetooth	180	08.15/FT	★★★★★						18x30x12
Pure Evoke F4	180	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★						18x21x11
Pure Digital One Flow	100	11.12/GT	★★★★★						15x21x8
Pure Pop Maxi	100	06.15/FT	★★★★★						17x19x10
Revo AXIS X3	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★						12.5x22x15
Revo Pixis	100	09.13/GT	★★★★★						13x16x16
Revo SuperConnect	280	09.14/FT	★★★★★						18x27x12
Roberts Revival iStream 2	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★						16x26x13
Roberts Stream 93i	150	11.14/FT	★★★★★						21x24x13
Ruark Audio R1 Mk3	200	04.15/FT	★★★★★						17x13x13.5
Tivoli Albergo+	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★						11x19x11
Tivoli Model 10+	160	09.13/GT	★★★★★						20x12x12
View Quest Christie	100	05.15/FT	★★★★★						14x22x13
View Quest Retro 1	100	12.11/GT	★★★★★						16x28x9



## Hi-fi speakers

**Standmounters** Usually smaller speakers that need to be put on a stand, not bookshelves  
**Floorstanders** Larger speakers that tend to go louder and deeper than standmounters  
**Powered** Have built-in amplifiers and need mains power to work

### The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Q Acoustics 3020**

Awards 2015: Best stereo speaker under £200



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**B&W 685 S2**

Awards 2015: Best standmounter £400-£800



**AWARD WINNER**  
**ATC SCM 11**

Awards 2015: Best standmounter up to £1200+

### Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £200</b>								
Audioengine P4	183	02.10/FT	★★★★★				3	23x14x17
Cambridge Audio Aero 2	150	03.15/ST	★★★★★				2	37x20x31
Cambridge Audio SX-50	130	04.14/ST	★★★★★				2	23x16x24



## SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
<b>Up to £200</b>								
Edifier R1700BT	120	10.15/GT	★★★★★	Lively and likeable, these appealing budget desktop speakers fall just short of getting full marks	●	●	1	25x15x21
Mission MX1	150	06.11/GT	★★★★★	A real return to form from Mission	●		4	28x17x26
Monitor Audio MR2	160	03.15/ST	★★★★★	A very good attempt at a budget hi-fi speaker	●		2	35x19x25
Polk Audio TSx110B	100	03.15/FT	★★★★★	They're not perfect but these budget speakers are a pleasant surprise	●		2	28x18x23
Q Acoustics 2010i	120	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Set the standard at this price and size level	●		4	23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	150	03.15/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2013	●		4	26x17x28
Q Acoustics 3020	190	05.15/ST	★★★★★	<b>Best stereo speaker under £200, Awards 2015</b>	●		5	26x17x23
Roth Oli RA1	100	12.14/FT	★★★★★	If space is at a premium and your budget is low, then these are an excellent fit	●		2	23x15x15
SoundScience QSB	85	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Compact, clever and with a big detailed sound	●		1	85x85x85
Wharfedale DS-1	130	10.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best desktop speaker under £200, Awards 2015</b>	●	●	1	19x11x15
<b>£200-£500</b>								
Acoustic Energy 101	250	07.15/FT	★★★★★	Re-energised with a lively sound, these tiny Acoustics are an appealing proposition	●		2	30x19x25
Acoustic Energy 301	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Very good speakers for the money – definitely worthy of consideration	●		2	30x19x25
Audioengine A5+	290	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Bigger, better and more flexible than the originals	●		3	27x18x20
Audio Pro Addon T8	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Punchy and energetic, these beautifully built speakers aren't perfect but they are enjoyable	●	●	2	16x10x14
Audio Pro Addon T14	400	10.15/GT	★★★★★	A charming, clean looking pair of speakers that are mired by some thick, tubby bass	●	●	2	22x15x20
Bose Companion 20	200	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Solid, reliable speakers for buyers on a tight budget		●	1	22x9x12
Bose Computer MusicMonitor	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable sound for a speaker this small	●		2	12x7x12
B&W 685	400	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Great Award-winning speakers from B&W. Just edged out by newer rivals	●		4	34x20x33
B&W MM-1	399	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Still good, but there's better available		●	1	17x10x10
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 2	450	12.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine pair of stand-mounters, however a little honing wouldn't go amiss	●		2	37x20x3
Cambridge Audio Aero 6	400	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Superb floorstanders; you'll struggle to find better at this price point		●	2	98x24x34
Cambridge Audio SX-60	200	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Impressive speakers but they could do with more refinement	●		2	34x20x27
Dali Lektor 2	299	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●		2	31x18x22
Dali Zensor 1	200	03.15/ST	★★★★★	These Dali's are still entertaining all-rounders, but they've finally been outclassed	●		2	27x16x22
Dali Zensor 3	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	If it's entertainment you crave, then these standmounters deliver in spades	●		3	35x21x29
Epos K1	400	04.15/ST	★★★★★	For £400 the K1s put in a decent performance. Rivals have the edge in terms of excitement, though	●		2	31x19x25
Epos Aktimate Micro B	300	10.15/GT	★★★★★	Well-behaved but rivals are a bit livelier	●	●	3	24x15x20
Focal Chorus 706V	390	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●		3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	300	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop		●	1	28x11x20
Focal XS Book Wireless	300	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Stacks of detail but not quite the measure of their rivals		●	1	28x11x20
JBL Arena 170	400	06.15/GT	★★★★★	These JBLs are talented, lively speakers		●	2	96x22x28
KEF Q300	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Not quite at the top anymore, but still fine, engaging standmounters	●		3	36x21x30
Monitor Audio Bronze 2	280	09.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best stereo speaker £200-£400, Awards 2015</b>	●		4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-made and refined speakers, just lacking the flexibility of its rivals	●		6	31x19x24
Mission MX2	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Dynamic enough but maybe too exciting	●		4	34x21x31
Mission MX3	350	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Peppy and communicative floorstanders		●	4	82x17x34
Pioneer S-CN301-LR	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Polished, insightful and appealing	●		1	23x14x22
Q Acoustics 3050	500	06.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best floorstander under £600, Awards 2015</b>	●		5	100x20x30
Q Acoustics 2050i	460	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander up to £600, Awards 2014		●	4	100x32x27
Q Acoustics Concept 20	350	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£400, Awards 2014	●		2	26x17x28
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	350	06.14/ST	★★★★★	There are few products as versatile and as easy to like as the Q-BT3s at this price	●		4	31x19x24



## Sendor D7 Simply the Best

"Among the finest speakers I've heard at any price"  
Sam Tellig, Stereophile Nov 2014

"However it's been achieved, we can't help but marvel at the sound from the D7's. Sendor D7's set the standard for speakers at this price"  
What Hi-Fi Oct 2013

Let the technology work- Hear the music

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION  
★★★★★

stereophile

CLASS A RECOMMENDED  
COMPONENT 2015

WHAT HI-FI?  
AWARDS 2014  
Stereo speakers  
Best Floorstander £1000+  
Sendor D7

**SENDER**

www.sendoraudio.com

## SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Quad 11L Classic	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●		4	31x19x24
Ruark Audio MR1	300	10.15/GT	★★★★★	Best desktop speakers, Awards 2014	●	●	3	17x13x14
Tannoy Mercury V1i	150	04.14/ST	★★★★★	A stylish, self-assured pair of speakers that are well worth auditioning	●		2	30x17x26
Tannoy Mercury V4	380	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Feisty sounds at a fantastic price	●		2	97x20x28
Tannoy Mercury V4i	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An exciting and punchy listen, but it comes with compromises	●		1	100x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	380	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well worth considering if your listening room isn't too big	●		2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	400	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £350-£700, Awards 2012	●		1	36.5x20x25
Wharfedale Diamond 121	230	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival	●		7	32x17x23
Wharfedale Diamond 220	200	03.15/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2014	●		4	50x32x41
Wharfedale Diamond 230	500	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Loses a star but still offers plenty of value	●		4	94x20x33

## £500-£1500

Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	1000	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A classic yes, but not the best around	●		2	30x18x26
Audio Pro LV2e	700	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish			3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	1200	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with resolution and speed		●	5	98x14x24
ATCSM11 (2013)	1200	11.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best standmounter £800-£1500, Awards 2015</b>	●		2	38x21x25
AVIADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A simple way to make the most of your music	●		5	30x20x26
B&W 683 S2	1150	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £600-£1200, Awards 2014		●	2	99x19x36
B&W 684 S2	800	05.15/ST	★★★★★	A floorstander that's capable in many areas but, as a whole, is less than the sum of its parts		●	2	92x16x23
B&W 685 S2	500	04.15/ST	★★★★★	<b>Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2015. Product of the Year</b>	●		2	35x19x32
Cabasse MT32 Antigua	500	04.15/ST	★★★★★	Wonderfully easy on the ears, the MT32s are a smooth listen	●		2	41x22x30
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 6	900	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Lots of potential with these speakers, however they struggle in a few areas	●		2	98x24x34
Dali Ikon 1 MK2	530	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge sound and good timing, these Dalis are heartily recommended	●		3	33x15x26
Dali Mentor Menuet	900	07.12/ST	★★★★★	These Menuets are something of a gem	●		2	25x15x23
Dali Opticon 1	500	10.15/FT	★★★★★	Dali has unleashed a pair of diminutive speakers that sound great, despite a few wobbles	●		3	26x15x23
Dali Zensor 5	549	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Compact and affordable floorstanders		●	2	84x16x27
Dali Zensor 7	729	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but musical and enjoyable performers		●	3	98x21x31
Dynaudio DM 2/6	535	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Just the right amount of sparkle at the top end	●		2	29x17x24
Dynaudio DM3/7	1300	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander		●	2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Excite X14	945	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A crisp and clean sound is shortchanged by a lack of versatility	●			29x17x26
Dynaudio Xeo 3	1365	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Versatile wireless speakers	●		2	28x17x26
Eclipse TD508 Mk3	960	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Not an all-rounder, but still a rather special speaker	●		3	29x18x27
Elac BS 142	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	An organic sounding and entertaining pair of speakers that are fun to listen to	●		1	26x16x26
Elac FS 147	1100	07.14/AT	★★★★★	A fun set of speakers if you're after entertainment over analysis		●	1	95x22x30
Elipson Planet L	600	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Charming in many ways, with good transparency		●	3	40x42x43
Eclipse Planet LW Bridge System	1400	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A commendable effort; decent sound and stylish looks to go with it	●	●	3	29 diameter
Epos K2	1000	05.15/ST	★★★★★	Small floorstanders with a big sound. We like the minimalist look, too		●	2	86x19x25
Epoz AktiMate Blue	600	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Position them well and you'll be rewarded with a lovely, engaging sound	●		3	32x21x31
Guru Junior	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A rather mundane appearance is excused by some very expressive sound	●		3	28x18x24
Focal Aria 905	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	A hugely accomplished pair of standmounters, although the finish could be better	●		2	31x19x25
Focal Aria 906	760	12.13/ST	★★★★★	For scale, power and refinement, you won't find many better	●		3	33x21x25
Jamo C103	850	08.15/GT	★★★★★	These Jamos look like they mean business, but they could do with a little more punch	●		3	42x22x30
JBL Studio 530	650	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Odd looking - but fun sounding and refined	●		1	47x21x22
KEF LS50	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2013	●		1	30x20x28
KEF R100	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Still great but now surpassed by newer rivals	●		4	28x18x29
KEF R300	1000	11.15/GT	★★★★★	You get a lot of sound for the money, just not as much as from its rivals. A good buy nonetheless	●		4	39x21x35
KEF X300A	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A smooth, relaxed sound that lacks punch and dynamics	●		1	28x18x24
Martin Logan Motion 15	795	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Needs a bit more authority but let loose in a smaller room they can really sing	●		2	29x13x24
Martin Logan Motion 35XT	1300	11.15/GT	★★★★★	If scale and authority is what you want, you won't be disappointed by these speakers	●		3	34x19x30
Mission SX2	700	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Dependable and capable, the SX2s produce an authoritative sound at a fine price	●		5	38x23x37
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine, refined speakers but outclassed by stronger newcomers		●	4	85x17x25
Monitor Audio Gold 50	950	11.15/GT	★★★★★	An attractive option that's a good choice for smaller spaces	●		4	30x17x26
Monitor Audio Gold GX50	950	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Still good and still great looking, but loses out to rivals in terms of musical engagement	●		5	30x17x26
Monitor Audio Silver 1	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A bit fussy when it comes to positioning, the Silver 1s still ooze quality	●		6	31x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver 6	1000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	The Silver 6s reveal plenty of detail, but there are better all-rounders out there		●	6	89x19x24
Monitor Audio SoundFrame 1	900	02.12/GT	★★★★★	An impressive alternative to conventional speakers			2	54x39x9
Mission MX-5	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Physically and sonically impressive		●	4	100x25x39
Mission SX1	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Almost mission accomplished. Hugely capable but not as entertaining as the class leaders	●		5	31x19x29
Neat Iota	695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Attractive but with a hefty sound too	●		5	13x20x17
Neat Motive 2	945	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Cohesive, authoritative and downright exciting		●	4	77x16x20
Neat Motive SX2	1395	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Great little speakers with only a few small imperfections		●	4	77x16x20



## SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>£500-£1500</b>							
Neat Motive SX3	1045	11.15/GT	★★★★★	Small and full of attitude, these musical-sounding speakers are bags of fun	●	4	33x16x20
PMC Twenty 21	1485	10.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're looking for a top-class pair of standmounters, these are well worth a listen	●	4	33x15x28
ProAc Studio 118	1075	11.15/GT	★★★★★	It's hard to find fault with this lively, energetic-sounding standmount	●	4	38x19x24
PSB Imagine Mini	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Tiny speakers with a surprising amount of heft. Good for a smaller room	●	5	23x14x21
PSB Imagine X1T	750	05.15/ST	★★★★★	Big on fun and energy, these could do with more subtlety and refinement. Highly commended, though	●	5	23x14x21
Opera Mezza	850	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Suave-looking and good-sounding, but these don't possess the sonic assertiveness of some	●	3	32x20x33
Q Acoustics Concept 40	1000	05.15/ST	★★★★★	A talented and easy-going pair of speakers. They deserve serious consideration	●	2	97x17x29
Quad 9AS	600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A decent pair of speakers but they need more punch and verve	●	3	30x15x21.5
Quad 12L Classic	500	11.11/FT	★★★★★	There's plenty to admire here	●	4	34x21x28
Rega RS3	780	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Floorstanders that are effortless with dynamics	●	3	80x22x25
Tannoy Precision 6.1	900	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Rhythmic, detailed speakers but a lack of solidity leaves them sounding unbalanced	●	2	33x22x26
Tannoy Revolution DC6 SE	700	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Responsive with a good sense of cohesion. Could do with a little more spark	●	1	37x20x24
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	799	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £700-£1500, Awards 2011	●	1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Best floorstander £800-£1500, Awards 2013	●	1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	DC4s are still appealing across the board	●	2	27x17x18
Tannoy Revolution XT 6	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	Tannoy's new range is an exciting step forward, although a little more detail wouldn't go amiss	●	2	40x22x30
Tannoy Revolution XT 6F	1000	05.15/ST	★★★★★	<b>Best floorstander £600-£1200, Awards 2015</b>	●	2	100x27x32
Tannoy Revolution XT 8F	1300	07.15/FT	★★★★★	Give them space and partner them well and few rivals will be able to match them	●	2	108x32x35
Triangle Antal 902	900	05.15/ST	★★★★★	The power comes through but at the cost of subtlety. Still, there aren't many that offer this much fun	●	1	110x26x31
Triangle Color 123	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	A brilliant desktop speaker package	●	3	14x14x14
Triangle Esprit Titus EZ	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	A classy pair of articulate and expressive standmounters	●	3	31x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	500	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Relaxed yet engaging sound has a lot of appeal	●	1	32x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 155	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Class leaders when it comes to sound, but let down by average build quality	●	7	94x20x31
<b>£1500 and above</b>							
Acoustic Energy Reference 1	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Terrific all-rounders for the money	●	1	31x19x28
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★	These planar floorstanders are a sonic treat	●	1	168x61x6
ATC SCM19	2000	06.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best standmounter £1500+, Awards 2015</b>	●	2	44x27x30
ATC SCM20ASL Pro	4380	10.15/FT	★★★★★	Their appearance is drab but the performance is one of rare quality	●	1	45x25x39
ATC SCM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massively talented and proportioned	●	4	107x40x56
ATC SCM40A	6280	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Favours an analytical reproduction of music, these ATCs offer exceptional sound performance	●	2	98x37x34
B&O BeoLab 5	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	Active speakers with outlandish looks that sound fabulous	7	1	97x49x49
B&W 800 Diamond	18000	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Some of the best speakers money can buy	●	3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	3750	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Good, but easier to admire than really love	●	3	42x24x35
B&W CM6 S2	1500	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Good speakers but they lack the freedom of expression that we'd expect	●	3	40x20x30
B&W PM1	1995	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1500+, Awards 2011	●	1	33x19x30
Burmester B10	3220	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Well built, well refined and an engaging listen. We're in love	●	3	39x22x28
Dali Epicon 2	3750	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Reinforces Dali's reputation for making top-class speakers	●	3	39x21x37
Dali Epicon 8	11500	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Give them space and they'll deliver a muscular, enthusiastic sound	●	3	126x35x50
Dali Fazon F5	2700	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish deliverers of audiophile sound	●	3	92x28x32
Dali Rubicon 2	1600	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A great pair of standmounters that deliver an expressive and enthusiastic sound	●	4	35x20x34
Dali Rubicon 5	2400	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Another pair of fine speakers from Dali – fast, agile and authoritative	●	4	89x20x34
Dynaudio Focus 160	1800	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Just do the job and don't intrude on the entertainment	●	6	35x20x29



"The ELAC Debut series delivers superior performance thanks to custom made key components, with no off-the-shelf parts. Unlike many more expensive speakers that mix parts-bin drivers, bare-bones crossovers and generic cabinets—every ELAC speaker is built from a clean-sheet design."



**ELAC**  
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**[Debut]**

by  
Andrew Jones



HiFiNetworkLtd

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## SPEAKERS continued

SPEAKERS continued					Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict						
Dynaudio Xeo 4	1775	11.14/FT	★★★★★	The Xeo 4s serve great-quality, convenient, versatile wireless sound	●		●	2	28x17x25
Diapason Astera	6050	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Spellbinding performance with the right kind of music	●			1	38x26x44
Eclipse TD 510Z Mk2	3840	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Superb timing, detail and imaging			●	3	98x38x39
Eclipse TD 712z Mk2	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	They have a few compromises but their strengths can't be matched at any price	●			4	99x35x43
EgglesonWorks Nico	2495	09.15/FT	★★★★★	Match them carefully and the Nicos can offer plenty of enthusiasm	●			3	38x19x33
Focal Diablo Utopia	7686	12.12/FT	★★★★★	When it comes to levels of insight, little at this price even comes close	●			Any	43x26x43
Focal SM9	4580	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Intended for professional use, the SM9s work brilliantly as home speakers	●			1	32x49x39
Focal Easya	1800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Convenient and easy to use, these Focals are compromised by a relaxed delivery	●			2	90x17x24
Focal Electra 1038Be	7700	07.15/FT	★★★★★	Light them up and these floorstanders will have no problem shining. Wonderfully accomplished		●		2	125x30x40
GamuT M'inert M3	5140	03.14/FT	★★★★★	These are some of the best standmounters we've ever heard	●			10	40x23x46
Image Audio IA8	2000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive wall-mounted alternatives to convention				1	59x48x10
Linn Akubarik	15600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive engineering but its presentation veers towards the clinical		●		200+	105x35x45
Monitor Audio Gold GX200	2300	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Pretty looks and excellent refinement		●		2	90x17x30
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	6000	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait		●		3	111x41x47
Naim Ovator S-400	3650	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The most rounded Naim speaker we've heard		●		5	106x33x35
Neat Ultimatum XLS	4500	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●			9	38x22x37
PMC Fact 3	4100	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Hugely capable but a touch overcontrolled	●			4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	4700	04.10/FT	★★★★★	These PMC floorstanders are quite simply magical - even at this price		●		4	103x15x38
PMC Twenty 22	1970	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1200+, Awards 2014	●			4	41x18x37
PMC Twenty 23	2300	02.14/GT	★★★★★	These really are top-class floorstanders		●		4	92x15x33
PMC Twenty 26	5750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Yet another top-class speaker from PMC's Twenty range		●		4	109x19x44
PMC Wafer 2	2295	02.12/GT	★★★★★	A real achievement for those after proper hi-fi				2	57x35x10
ProAc Response D18	2145	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2011		●		6	93x19x27
ProAc Response D30R	4750	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Superb all-rounders		●		6	104x22x31
ProAc Response D40/R	6125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Articulate and dynamic, a top-class pair of floorstanders		●		6	120x21x34
ProAc Studio 140 Mk2	1650	12.10/FT	★★★★★	An entertaining and dynamic performer		●		4	104x19x28
Quad ESL-2812	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Won't be to everyone's tastes but these electrostatic speakers truly excel		●		1	107x69x38
Quad ESL 2905	6000	01.07/FT	★★★★★	A truly world-class speaker		●		1	143x70x39
Roksan Darius S1	5000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Excellent pair of performers and one of the most enjoyable stand-mounters we've heard	●			2	38x20x38
SPAcoustics SP1 Signature	14950	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Able to challenge the very best at this exalted level		●		Any	106x35x46
Spendor A5	1695	03.11/GT	★★★★★	The most accomplished speakers for this money		●		4	79x17x25
Spendor A5R	2000	11.15/FT	★★★★★	A capable pair of speakers but we wish they were a little more fun		●		5	83x17x25
Spendor A6R	2500	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1200+, Awards 2015		●		5	87.5x19x28
Spendor D7	3500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The finest Spendors in years		●		6	95x20x32
Tannoy Precision 6.2	1700	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A beautifully balanced and hugely listenable pair of standmounters	●			3	100x31x28
Tannoy Precision 6.4	2200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If bass is important to you, then these speakers are worth an audition		●		3	105x31x35
Tannoy Definition DC8	2500	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Capable of seriously controlled sound	●			3	47x27x26
Tannoy Definition DC10T	5250	10.13/GT	★★★★★	While the DC10Ts aren't the most refined speakers out there, they're easy to love	●			3	113x34x32
Tannoy Kensington GR	9950	08.15/FT	★★★★★	A retro, effortlessly accomplished pair of speakers		●		2	110x41x34
Totem Element Ember	3995	05.14/FT	★★★★★	If you're looking for entertainment, we can't think of a better alternative	●			2	36x11x25
Triangle Signature Delta	4900	07.14/FT	★★★★★	If you value excitement and entertainment, put these speakers at the top of your shortlist		●		3	123x37x39
Wharfedale Jade-5	1650	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Floorstanders that pack immense power and poise		●		3	106x25x40
Wilson Audio Duette II	19000	02.15/FT	★★★★★	It needs a capable amp and source but when Duette II gets going it sounds breathtaking		●		16	47x27x31
Wilson Audio Sophia 3	16500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but they deliver a stunning sound full of detail, dynamics and drive		●		7	105x35x48



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## Stereo amplifiers

**Integrated** These amplifiers combine a preamp and power section in one box  
**Power output** A higher number usually means louder, depending on speakers  
**Digital inputs** Some amplifiers now have a DAC built in, which could be useful

### The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Onkyo A-9010**

Awards 2015: Best stereo amp under £300



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Cambridge CXA60**

Awards 2015: Best stereo amp £300-£700



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Rega Elex-R**

Awards 2015: Best stereo amp £700-£1000

### Also consider

Also consider					Power(w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speakerouts	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict															
Up to £1000																		
Audiolab 8200A	750	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Capable, but lacks some subtlety	60	6	0	0	3	1	1	2	7.5x45x34					
Arcam FMJ A19	650	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Stereo amp £500-£800, Awards 2014	50	6	1	0	1	2	1	1	9x43x28					
Cambridge CXA60	500	08.15/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £300-£700, Awards 2015. Product of the Year	60	4	0	0	0	1	1	2	12x43x34					
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering ifyou prefer an energetic approach	45	5	0	0	1	2	1	2	9x43x34					
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Meaty and powerful, but not the most refined	75	5	0	0	1	2	1	2	12x43x35					
Creek Audio Evolution 50A	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	An entertaining amp that holds its own against established rivals	55	5	0	0	0	1	1	2	6x43x8					
Cyrus 6a	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Still precise and insightful but now lacks rivals' energy	40	6	0	0	0	2	1	2	7x22x36					
Denon PMA-720AE	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50	4	1	0	1	1	1	2	12x43x31					
Marantz PM6005	300	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp up to £500, Awards 2014	45	5	1	0	1	2	1	2	11x44x37					
Micromega MyAmp	480	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An amp with attack and verve, although the finish could be better	30	3	0	0	0	1	1	2	7.5x14x14					
Monitor Audio Airstream A100	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Insightful and composed, this is a worthy rival to the NAD D 3020	50	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	5x37x21					
NAD C316BEE	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A decent listen that's overshadowed by rivals	40	5	0	0	1	1	1	2	8x44x29					
NAD C326BEE	300	07.10/GT	★★★★★	A really musical amplifier to grace any budget system	50	7	0	0	2	1	1	2	10x44x29					
NAD C356BEE	600	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A party animal of an amplifier	80	7	0	0	2	2	1	2	13x44x34					
NAD C356BEE DAC	695	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A good amplifier with a great DAC	80	8	0	0	2	2	1	2	13x44x34					
NAD D 3020	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A punchy and lively sound that's great fun to listen to	30	2	0	0	0	1	1	2	19x6x22					
NAD D 7050	800	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Admirable, but not quite the measure of its cheaper rivals	50	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	24x7x27					
Naim Nait 5i	875	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-round performer	50	4	0	0	1	1	1	2	7x44x31					
Naim Nait 5si	925	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £800-£1500, Awards 2013	60	3	0	0	1	1	1	2	7x43x31					
Onix A-25	775	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A good choice for those who value finesse over muscle	30	3	0	0	0	1	1	2	9x21x36					
Onkyo A-9010	200	06.15/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp under £300, Awards 2015	44	5	1	0	1	1	1	2	13x44x33					
Onkyo A-9030	300	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Proof that Onkyo knows how to build good stereo gear	65	4	1	0	1	2	1	2	14x44x33					
Onkyo A-9050	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Lean presentation, but there's plenty to like	75	5	1	0	1	1	1	2	14x44x33					
Pro-Ject Stereo Box S	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A small amp that's worth investigation	40	2	0	0	0	1	1	2	4x10x10					
Pioneer A-70	800	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas, falls short of class-leading	90	3	1	1	1	2	1	2	14x44x36					



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## AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamplifier	Speaker out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Quad Vena	600	01.15/FT	★★★★★	An interesting proposition but it's left wanting in terms of finesse	46	●	2	0	0	●	0	●	1	●	●	●	4	10x31x30
Rega Brio-R	480	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £400-£600, Awards 2012	50	●	4	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	8x22x31
Rega Elex-R	900	01.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best stereo amp £700-£1000, Awards 2015</b>	72	●	4	1	0	1	●	1	●	1	●	●	1	8x43x32
Roksan Kandy K2	795	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £700-£1000, Awards 2011	125	●	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	1	●	●	3	10x43x38
Roksan Kandy K2 BT	895	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Full of power and punch but some heart and soul is missing	140	●	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	1	●	●	2	11x43x38
Rotel RA-10	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Sounds good, but rivals offer more insight and better digital features	40	●	4	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	7x43x34
Rotel RA-12	600	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Well priced, appealing amp, just lacks a little expression	60	●	4	1	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
TEAC AI-301DA	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An amp with an unadventurous, but pleasant presentation	30	●	2	0	0	●	0	●	1	●	●	●	2	6x21.5x25
Wadia 151 PowerDAC Mini	999	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact digital amp with plenty of appeal	25	●	0	0	0	●	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	7x20x20
Yamaha A-S501	360	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	A capable amplifier that's packed with features	60	●	6	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15x44x39
<b>£1000 and above</b>																		
Arcam FMJ A39	1500	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and authoritative, but it needs better timing and detail	120	●	6	1	0	●	1	●	2	●	●	●	1	10x43x43
Audio Ana. Fortissimo AirTech	1750	05.15/FT	★★★★★	A feature-packed and capable performer that's worth an audition	100	●	5	1	1	●	0	●	1	●	●	●	2	12x45x39
Burmester 032	12380	06.15/FT	★★★★★	It's big, pricey and it sounds fabulously good	105	●	6	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	1	19x48x48
Cambridge Audio Azur 851A	1200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	For scale, power, build and style, this is hard to beat	120	●	8	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	12x43x39
Cyrus 6XPD	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A sturdy DAC-toting amp that's a cracker	40	●	6	0	0	●	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8a	1350	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70	●	6	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 DAC	1400	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0	2	●	●	●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus DACXP Signature	3000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	70	●	2	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	7x22x36
Dan D'Agostino Momentum Int.	42000	11.15/FT	★★★★★	It's very (very) expensive but this is the best amp we've ever heard	200	●	6	0	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	11x46x41
Devialet 110	4490	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An exceptional all-rounder	110	●	1	1	0	●	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	4x38x38
Devialet D-Premier	11450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A fresh look at amp design	240	●	2	1	1	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	3	4x40x40
EAR Yoshino V12	7000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	This terrific integrated amp needn't fear any rival at this price	50	●	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	14x42x14
Heed Audio Obelisk si	1300	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A musical and talented amplifier	35	●	5	1	0	0	●	1	1	1	1	1	2	9x22x36
Karan Acoustics KA1180Mk2	5995	09.13/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest amps we've heard	180	●	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	9x50x34
Leema Tucana Mk II	3595	12.11/ST	★★★★★	An incredibly able stereo amp	148	●	7	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	10x43x36
Leema Elements	1395	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid choice, wide connection range and optional DAC	56	●	3	0	0	●	0	●	1	●	●	●	2	9x22x28
Naim Nait 5XS	1500	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still a top class premium amplifier	60	●	3	0	0	2	●	1	1	1	1	1	1	7x43x30
Naim Nait XS 2	1595	10.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the Nait XS, even if it sacrifices a little detail	70	●	5	1	0	1	●	1	1	1	1	1	1	7x43x30
Naim Supernait 2	2750	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Even at this price, the Supernait 2 is a fantastic buy	80	●	5	0	0	1	●	1	1	1	1	1	1	9x43x31
Pathos ClassicRemix HiDAC	2850	05.15/FT	★★★★★	Another intriguing offering from Pathos that offers top-notch sound	70	●	5	0	0	●	0	●	1	1	1	1	5	17x37x28
Pathos Ethos	3800	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Mixes style and substance better than any rival	100	●	7	0	0	●	0	●	1	1	1	1	1	15x43x49
Pathos InpolRemix	3800	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap or powerful - just brilliant	10	●	1	0	0	0	●	1	1	1	1	1	2	18x33x29
Pathos Logos Mk II	3950	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Mixes fine aesthetics with a great sound for a terrific amp	110	●	5	0	0	●	1	●	1	1	1	1	1	17x42x43
Quad II Classic Integrated	4500	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25	●	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20x31x38
Rega Osiris	5998	06.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine amp that makes sense partnering its Isis sibling	162	●	6	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	12x44x35
Rega Elicit-R	1600	02.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best stereo amp £1000+, Awards 2015</b>	105	●	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	1	●	●	1	8x43x34
Roksan Caspian M2	1695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	85	●	5	0	0	1	●	1	1	1	1	1	2	8x43x33
Roksan K3	1250	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An excellent all-rounder at a reasonable price	150	●	5	1	0	1	●	1	1	1	1	1	3	10x43x38
Sony TA-A1ES	2000	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Not quite a flawless effort but talented enough in key areas	80	●	5	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13x43x42
T+APA 3000 HV	9900	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A truly impressive piece of kit despite its polite disposition	300	●	6	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17x46x46
Unison Research Simply Italy	1495	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A well-engineered valve amplifier at a sensible price	12	●	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	26x19x35
Unison Research Triode 25	2350	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An absolutely superb amplifier from Unison Research	45	●	5	0	0	Opt	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20x30x45



**£499 OR LESS**

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**Denon**  
**AVR-X2200W**  
**7.2 CHANNEL AV RECEIVER**

Packed with the latest audio and video technologies, the AVR-X2200W delivers incredibly immersive surround sound, built on an extensive sound tuning and plenty of amp power. With Dolby Atmos, you'll experience the same revolutionary 3D surround sound found in premium cinemas.

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## Preamps

Preamps are also known as control units. On a most basic level, they perform two functions: source selection and volume control. Most powered preamps also amplify the signal slightly in order to make matching to a power amplifier easier. Some include phono stages.

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £5000</b>													
Cyrus DACXP+	2550	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●		●	7x22x36
Heed Audio Obelisk pre/px	2230	04.13/FT	★★★★★	A superb-sounding preamp, but Heed needs to make it feel more luxurious	5	0	0	1	●			●	9x22x33
Lavardin C62	3471	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Belongs near the top of any shortlist	6	0	0	1	●				9x43x31
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	650	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	0		●	●	●	8x44x29
Naim NAC 152XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●			●	7x43x30
Quad QC-twenty four	1000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Pleasant listen but works best with Quad's valve power amps	5	0	0	2	●				9x30x22
Townshend Allegri	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	●				5x13x31
<b>£5000 and above</b>													
Aesthetix Janus Signature	10000	04.15/FT	★★★★★	You won't find many high-end preamps better than this one	5	1	1	1	●	●		●	11x45x46
Audio Research LS27	6500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●		●	13x48x34
Aesthetix Calypso Signature	6400	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest preamps on the market today	5	0	0	1	●	●		●	11x46x45
Bryston BP26DA	5050	08.06/FT	★★★★★	A must-hear preamp. Lacks style but built to last	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	6x49x28
Burmester 808 MK5	22242	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●		●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	25500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	8	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
GamuT D3i	5500	01.15/FT	★★★★★	If you want an insightful and honest pre-amp, this is a fine place to start	4	0	0	1	●	●		●	11x43x42
Krell Phantom II	12000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable preamp that is able to dig deeply into any recording	8	0	0	1	●	●		●	10x44x46
Mark Levinson 326S	9300	07.15/FT	★★★★★	A classy and composed offering when used with the 532H power amplifier	7	0	0	2	●	●		●	7x45x35
McIntosh C2500	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A refined and entertaining preamp that needs a little care in partnering	8	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	19x44x46



## Power amps

These are effectively the powerhouse of the system. They deliver the high currents necessary to make a loudspeaker work. They can be configured as a stereo unit, or monoblocs, where the circuitry for each channel is housed separately. Don't judge a power amp by its output level.

### Our recommendations

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XLR in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
Up to £5000										
Audiolab 8200MB	1900	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Hefty, but a bit of a blunt instrument	Mono	250	1	1	15x22x38	9
ATC P1	1566	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless power amp when paired with the CA-2 preamp	Stereo	150	1	1	14x44x35	26
Bryston 2B SST	2925	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Big, strong and very powerful	Stereo	100	1	0	49x13x41	14
Chord Electronics Maxx	990	05.11/FT	★★★★★	This could be a sign of hi-fi to come	Stereo	20	1	0	7x16x4	0.4

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## Pioneer BDP-LX58 BLU-RAY DISC PLAYER

Blu-ray player featuring hi-res audio playback along with playback from 3D Blu-ray discs, DVD, CD, and SACD. Via LAN, you get access to advanced networking features such as BD-Live and DLNA.

A perfect partner for Pioneer's LX series of Dolby Atmos / DTS:X receivers.

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## POWER AMPS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XLR in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
Cyrus Mono X300 Signature	2750	10.13/FT	★★★★★	A deceptively compact monobloc that surpasses the Mono X300	Mono	225	1	1	8x22x37	6.5
Heed Audio Obelisk ps	1350	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Engaging and a pleasure to listen to, even if it's not the classiest in terms of finish	Stereo	50	1	0	9x22x33	6
NAD C275BEE	820	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A great power amp, best matched with the C165BEE preamp	Stereo	150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP 155 XS	1115	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's a good performer, but not the last word in dynamics	Stereo	60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP 250	3050	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Paired with the NAC252 preamp it's magical	Stereo	80	0	0	9x43x32	16

## £5000 and above

Atlas Stereo Signature	10000	04.15/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest power amps we've heard. An absolute beast	Stereo	200	2	2	22x46x48	32
Audio Research Reference 75	8495	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous power amp, match it with care and you'll have sonic magic	Stereo	75	0	1	22x48x50	21
Burmester 911 Mk3	32800	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Awesome price, awesome bit of kit	Stereo	535	0	1	22x48x48	31
Chord SPM 14000 MkII	24480	01.13/FT	★★★★★	An awe-inspiring monobloc, yet not quite as sonically rounded as we'd like	Mono	700	1	1	31x48x69	75
GamuT D200i	9300	01.15/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest power amplifiers we've heard	Stereo	220	1	1	16x43x47	34
Krell Evolution 402e	18500	11.12/FT	★★★★★	The Evolution 402e is world-class. It isn't cheap, but quality such as this never is	Stereo	400	1	1	25x44x56	61
Lavardin AP150	7686	12.10/FT	★★★★★	For sound quality and musical enjoyment, the C62 with the AP150 is hard to beat	Stereo	50	1	0	14x43x31	12
Mark Levinson 532H	7500	07.15/FT	★★★★★	A hefty, solid power amp that, when paired with 326S pre, offers a hugely entertaining sound	Stereo	300	1	1	19x45x50	34
Quad II eighty	6000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	A capable monobloc amp that should be considered	Mono	80	1	0	21x43x18	57



## iPod docks

**Docks with power** These are ready-made systems for your iPod and usually include speakers  
**Docks without power** These integrate an iPod into an existing system as a line level source

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		AirPlay	Bluetooth	Dock type	Aux	Power (w)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500										
B&W Z2	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Still impressive but lacks other, non-Apple streaming options compared with rivals			iOS	●	40	18x32x10
Epoz Aktimate Micro	260	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A pair of hugely enjoyable powered speakers from Epöz			iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Epoz AktiMate Mini+	360	08.13/FT	★★★★★	A versatile product that offers quality sound		●	iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	200	04.12/ST	★★★★★	AirPlay and iPad support, with good sound too	●		iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	200	03.13/FT	★★★★★	The Venue LT is a versatile, talented and enthusiastic dock		●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
KitSound Boom Dock	100	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Big, bold and brutally exciting			iOS	●	10	15x42x28
Logitech S715i	80	04.12/ST	★★★★★	Best speaker dock up to £200, Awards 2012			iOS	●	20	6x39x13
Logitech UE Air Speaker	300	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Best speaker dock £200-£350, Awards 2012	●		iOS	●	n/a	17x53x15
Orbitsound T12v3	299	12.11/FT	★★★★★	An effective panacea for your TV's sound			iOS	●	180	10x61x11
Pure Digital Contour 100Di	100	04.12/ST	★★★★★	Versatile, great looking and great sounding			iOS	●	20	18x31x15
Pure Digital Contour 200i Air	200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Pure's first radio-less speaker dock fares well, but it can be bettered	●		iOS	●	36	23x37x18
Revo K2	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Lots to like - but it's not perfect			iOS	●	40	33x11x11

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**Denon D-M40 DAB CD/DAB SYSTEM (Ex Speakers)**

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## IPOD DOCKS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Docktype	Aux	Power (w)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>£500 and above</b>									
B&W Zeppelin Air	500	12.11/ST	★★★★★			iOS		150	17x54x21
Geneva Lab Model M	550	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS		50	20x37x25
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	01.13/FT	★★★★★			iOS		4x20	13x24x24
Marantz Consolette	700	05.13/FT	★★★★★			iOS		150	26x54x21
Philips Fidelio SS DS9800	700	05.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS		100	22x27x9



## Wireless speakers

Bluetooth

Universal wireless system that's incorporated into most sources

AirPlay

Apple's accepted wireless system; works over your home network

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £300</b>									
Audio Pro Addon T3	165	11.15/GT	★★★★★						n/a
Bayan Audio SoundBook	150	01.14/GT	★★★★★						9x16x4
Bose SoundLink Mini	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★						5x18x6
Bose SoundLink Mini II	170	11.15/GT	★★★★★						5x18x6
Cambridge Audio Bluetone 100	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★						118x35x12
Cambridge Audio G5	230	11.15/GT	★★★★★						12x27x6
Cambridge Audio Go	120	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★						24x12x6
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★						18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	100	08.13/FT	★★★★★						23x24x6
Denon Envaya DSB200	170	11.14/FT	★★★★★						14x26x5
Denon Envaya Mini	100	ONLINE	★★★★★						5.4x21x5.1
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★						24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★						9x26x8
iLuv MobiOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★						0x0x0
JBL Charge	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★						18x7x7
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★						0x0x0
JBL Flip 2	100	07.14/GT	★★★★★						6.5x16x16
JBL OnBeat Rumble	230	10.14/GT	★★★★★						17x45x22
Loewe Speaker 2go	200	02.15/ST	★★★★★						11x24x5
Logitech UE Mobile Boombox	75	05.13/GT	★★★★★						6x7x11
JBL Xtreme	250	11.15/GT	★★★★★						13x28x12
Ministry Of Sound Audio M	150	11.15/GT	★★★★★						21x7x7
Monitor Audio Airstream S150	150	10.15/FT	★★★★★						n/a
Monitor Audio Airstream S200	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★						27x12x14
Monitor Audio Airstream S300	250	10.14/GT	★★★★★						15x47x15
Monitor Audio Airstream WS100	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★						13x12x12

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## WIRELESS SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Onkyo X6	150	11.15/GT	★★★★★	Well built and decent sounding – for its (small) size you'll struggle to find something better	●	●	●	●	●	13x28x9
Panasonic SC-NA10	130	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker that oozes class and subtlety. Watch out for the cabinet vibrations, though	●	●	●	●	●	10x20x3
Philips BT3500B	70	03.15/GT	★★★★★	An affordable wireless speaker with excellent sound quality	●	●	●	●	●	10x20x4
Pure Jongo S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound and easy portability make this a real gem	●	●	●	●	●	13x13x14
Pure Voca	65	03.15/GT	★★★★★	An attractive design is marred by some uncontrolled bass	●	●	●	●	●	7x19x5.5
Roberts Travel Pad	80	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Fine sound and a well-designed package make this a good travel companion	●	●	●	●	●	8x19x2.5
Roth OLi POWA-5	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Updated and better than before but rivals still have in edge in terms of sound	●	●	●	●	●	27x18x21
Samsung M5	230	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A talented speaker with a clean, open and fun sound	●	●	●	●	●	14x34x17
Sonos Play:1	170	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Another strong addition to the Award-winning Sonos multi-room family	●	●	●	●	●	16x12x12
Sony RDP-XA700	285	03.13/GT	★★★★★	With a bit more definition and a bit less bass this could have been the speaker for us	●	●	●	●	●	18x40x16
Sony SRS-X3	130	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely confident performer but its tonal balance won't be for everyone	●	●	●	●	●	7x19x7
Tibo Plus 2	150	09.15/GT	★★★★★	As a compact pair of Bluetooth speakers, the Tibo Plus 2 are good value for the price	●	●	●	●	●	21x13x20
Ultimate Ears Boom	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Loads of fun to listen to, the Boom is exciting, attractive and packed with features to boot	●	●	●	●	●	16x6.5x6.5
Ultimate Ears Megaboom	250	04.15/FT	★★★★★	Full of energy and a polished entertainer, the Megaboom shake (shakes) the room	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
Ultimate Ears Roll	100	09.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best portable wireless speaker under £100, Awards 2015</b>	●	●	●	●	●	4x13.5

## £300 and above

Audio Pro Allroom Air One	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A top-notch wireless speaker	●	●	●	●	●	20x31x19
Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay A2	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	Not perfect, but its spacious sound, battery life and stylish design are worthy of a look	●	●	●	●	●	14x26x4
Bluesound Generation 2	n/a	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best multiroom system £500+, Awards 2015, Product of the Year</b>	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
B&W A5	400	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Not the loudest but delivers a potent, punchy sound	●	●	●	●	●	18x30x20
B&W A7	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	If you use AirPlay, the A7 demands your attention	●	●	●	●	●	22x36x16
B&W T7	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	B&W's first Bluetooth speaker is a resounding success	●	●	●	●	●	11x21x5
Cabasse Stream 1	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Mediocre software lets this very enjoyable speaker down	●	●	●	●	●	14x46x33
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 200	430	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Majors in excitement, detail and power – a real entertainer	●	●	●	●	●	45x22x17
Dali Kubik Free	645	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £500-£750, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	31x15x15
Eclipse TD-M1	1000	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Great stereo imaging, but we'd like more refinement to go with it	●	●	●	●	●	24x16x22
Geneva AeroSphere Large	650	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best mains-powered wireless speaker £600-£800, Awards 2015</b>	●	●	●	●	●	41x41x32
Geneva Model M Wireless	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	If you're after Bluetooth and radio features, then this would be a good choice	●	●	●	●	●	22x30x18
Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	<b>Best mains-powered wireless speaker £200-£600, Awards 2015</b>	●	●	●	●	●	15x14x18
Libratone Zipp BT	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	A wireless speaker that's lovely to listen to	●	●	●	●	●	26x12x12
Libratone Loop	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	An enjoyable-sounding speaker with some unique looks	●	●	●	●	●	33x33x8
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Fussy set up issues aside, this is one incredibly capable speaker	●	●	●	●	●	24x13x24
KEF Egg	350	11.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best desktop speaker £200+, Awards 2015</b>	●	●	●	●	●	27x13x17
KEF Muo	300	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best portable wireless speaker £200+, Awards 2015</b>	●	●	●	●	●	8x21x6
Naim Mu-so	895	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best mains-powered wireless speaker £800+, Awards 2015</b>	●	●	●	●	●	12x63x26
NAD Viso 1 AP	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong, rounded package that thoroughly deserves your attention	●	●	●	●	●	26x48x30
Nobs NS2 v2	300	02.15/FT	★★★★★	Versatile and fun desktop speakers	●	●	●	●	●	16x11x14
Philips Fidelio E2	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Classy, versatile speakers but you'll need some room to accommodate them	●	●	●	●	●	30.5x16x16
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Bags of features, solid build and smart design – just watch that bass	●	●	●	●	●	21x36x17
Pure Jongo S3 (pair)	340	06.14/ST	★★★★★	A tad disappointing as a pair; rivals offer a more insightful performance	●	●	●	●	●	13x13x14
Pure Jongo System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Not the ultimate word in sound quality, but it wins us over with its peppy character	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
Samsung M7	330	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Overly fussy in terms of setting up, the M7 is a comfortable performer nonetheless	●	●	●	●	●	14 x40x19
Samsung Shape Audio System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Lacks a consistent sound across the range but a good first effort nonetheless	●	●	●	●	●	n/a

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## Q Acoustics 3020 SPEAKERS

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This medium sized bookshelf speaker benefits from an advanced, low distortion, wide dispersion, new Concentric Ring Dome tweeter; uprated 'audiophile' crossover and improved low resonance cabinet. In addition, it boasts a 125mm drive unit, with an Aramid Fibre/Paper cone material for an extended bass response.

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## WIRELESS SPEAKERS continued

WIRELESS SPEAKERS CONTINUED					AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict							
£300 and above										
Simple Audio Roomplayer+	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A worthy contender but there are cheaper, more impressive options out there	●	●				n/a
Sonos System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best multiroom system under £500, Awards 2015		●	●	●		n/a
Sony SRS-X9	600	06.14/FT	★★★★★	A do-it-all speaker with superb sound quality	●	●	●			13 x43 x 13
Tangent Classic	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker with a big sound and plenty of bass		●	●	●		23 x60 x 32



## Headphones

**Ear tips** Most in-ears come with these. Experiment with size to get the best fit  
**In-line remote** Mostly for Apple devices, but Android-friendly units are increasing. Handy...

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Up to £70										
AKG K323XSi	50	08.14/FT	★★★★★	As good as you can reasonably expect at this price range	●		Closed			n/a
AKG K451	50	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Good looking and sonically excellent	●		Closed			120
Audio Technica ATH-CKS55i	45	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Big on bass, these cans are no shrinking violets	●		Closed			6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	50	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Nicely balanced pair that just lack the wow factor of the class leaders	●		Closed			260
Apple EarPods	25	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A big upgrade of Apple's original earbuds, but there are better rivals	●		Open			10
Beyerdynamic DX120iE	60	09.15/GT	★★★★★	Acoustically they're strong but the dynamics are a little off the pace	●		Closed			32
Beyerdynamic DTX101iE	65	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Accomplished buds at an affordable price	●		Closed			11
Beyerdynamic DTX 350p	40	10.15/GT	★★★★★	The design is uninspiring but they're redeemed thanks to their sound	●		Closed			131
Beyerdynamic DTX 501 p	60	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A superb performance that's let down by an indifferent build quality	●		Closed			120
Etymotic Research MC5	57	01.12/GT	★★★★★	A likeable sound for the money	●		Closed			17
Grado iGrado	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Fabulous iPod upgrade: these are unbeatable at the price	●		Open			85
Jays a-Jays Four	50	12.11/FT	★★★★★	The Jays combine looks and performance to alluring effect	●		Closed			14
JVC HA-ETR40	35	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An affordable in-ear that nails both comfort and sound	●		Closed			6.6
Klipsch R6i	55	09.15/GT	★★★★★	Comfortable, expressive and fun. Cracking in-ears for the price	●		Closed			15.2
Ministry of Sound MOS003	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Tidy, well balanced and nicely made	●		Closed			15
Mix-Style inner headphones	30	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Punchy, controlled and balanced	●		Closed			13.5
Monster iSport Strive	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Stylish, sporty-looking buds with a fine sound	●		Closed			47
Panasonic RP-HTX7	35	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Flawless cans for this kind of cash	●		Closed			153
Philips CitiScape Downtown	55	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Fun, stylish and great to use on an everyday basis	●		Closed			174
Philips SHE9105	30	11.15/GT	★★★★★	A fine listen, though you could get better for a little bit more	●		Closed			13
RHA MA-350	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Nicely made from quality materials, with impressive sound to match	●		Closed			48
Sennheiser CX 300-II	30	09.10/GT	★★★★★	A no brainer upgrade for your portable player	●		Closed			4
Sennheiser CX 3.00	40	09.15/GT	★★★★★	Not the company's brightest star, but a solid effort nonetheless	●		Closed			12
Sennheiser CX281	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but a touch quiet	●		Closed			16
Sennheiser CX495	35	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant upgrade bargain	●		Closed			4
Sennheiser HD 202	26	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for the money and a bargain buy	●		Closed			130
Sennheiser HD 218	40	11.09/FT	★★★★★	For closed-back cans, the Sennheisers are very good – but not the best	●		Closed			224

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## HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise canceling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Sennheiser MM 70i	50	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Nice features for the money	●		Closed			12
Sennheiser PMX 685i Sports	45	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Modest looking in-ears but they have it where it counts despite the poor remote	●		Closed			18
Sennheiser PX100-II	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	An improvement over the previous model, very good open-backed cans	●		Open			80
Slick Distributions SD50	30	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Features and price make it easy to forgive minor sonic flaws	●		Closed		●	71
Sol Republic Relays	60	02.15/GT	★★★★★	A satisfying, fuss-free pair of in-ears	●		Closed			13.4
SoundMagic E10S	40	11.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best in-ears under £50, Awards 2015</b>	●		Closed			11
SoundMagic PL30	30	01.10/GT	★★★★★	Great headphones that are held back by better value rivals	●		Closed			10
SoundMagic E50S	50	09.15/GT	★★★★★	A close rival to Klipsch's R6i	●		Closed			15
SoundMagic PL50	50	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Comfy and smooth-sounding; great all-rounders	●		Closed			8
Sony MDR-EX650AP	60	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £50-£100, Awards 2014	●		Closed			9
Sony MDR-ZX660AP	50	10.15/GT	★★★★★	Built to last and offer a spacious sound, these Sonys are a good option at the price	●		Closed			195
Soul Electronics Flex	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Performance surpasses expectations at this price, a great buy for fitness bods	●		Closed			18
AKG K545	210	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Built to last but lacks refinement and likeability	●		Closed			280
AKG K550	100	02.12/ST	★★★★★	<b>Best home on-ears under £150, Awards 2015</b>	●		Closed			305
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Smashing all-rounders that really sing	●		Closed			305
AKG K812	1100	10.14/FT	★★★★★	It needs a top-class system to shine but these cans sound heavenly. Highly recommended	●		Open			390
AKG K845BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music clear and uncoloured, then these AKGs are definitely worth a listen	●		Closed		●	292
AKG Y45BT	110	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Both portable and comfortable, these cans could do with a bit of subtlety and refinement	●		Closed		●	150
AKG Y50BT	150	11.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best wireless headphones under £250, Awards 2015</b>	●		Closed			n/a
AKG Q701	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	A great, solid sounding set of cans. Comfy, too	●		Open			235
AKG Q460	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	More pros than cons, but still not complete	●		Closed			120
AKG Y50	50	09.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best portable on-ears under £100, Awards 2015. Product of the Year</b>	●		Closed			190
AKG N60 NC	230	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best noise-cancelling headphones under £250, Awards 2015</b>	●		Closed			150
Audeze LCD-3	1725	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Very expensive, but there's little to complain about here. Even with that price	●		Open			548
Audio Technica ATH-AD700X	190	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge headphones that offer an airy, open sound	●		Open			265
Audio Technica ATH-A900X LTD	390	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Remarkably clear and spacious sounding pair of headphones	●		Open			340
Audio Technica ATH-CKX9iS	75	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Easy on the ears and very comfortable, but they need a bit more refinement to be great	●		Closed			10
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	230	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Appealingly eccentric cans	●		Closed			130
Audio Technica ATH-M50	130	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Immersive and refined: a great effort	●		Closed			284
Audio Technica ATH-M50x	130	12.14/GT	★★★★★	They sound a little warm but these are fine headphones nonetheless	●		Closed			285
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Beautiful, and supremely non-leaky, headphone	●		Closed			350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	89	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	An excellent pair of on-ears for the bass-loving iPhone-owner	●		Closed			165
Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay H2	170	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A stylish pair of on-ears that combines impressive build quality with accessible sound	●		Closed			150
Beats Studio 2.0	270	04.15/GT	★★★★★	Eschewing detail for a smooth sound, these Beats are nevertheless exciting to listen to	●		Closed		●	260
Beyerdynamic DTX102iE	75	08.14/FT	★★★★★	There's little to fault with a pair of in-ears that demand to be listened to	●		Closed			11
Beyerdynamic DX160 iE	86	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong performer from Beyerdynamic with a smooth, weighty sound	●		Closed			32
Beyerdynamic Custom One Pro	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Accomplished and easy to listen to. We like them	●		Closed			290
Beyerdyna. Custom One Pro Plus	190	10.15/GT	★★★★★	They look hefty and what of the sound? As solid as the looks	●		Closed			290
Beyerdynamic DT880	200	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Comfortable and the sound is impressive	●		Open		● ●	340
Beyerdynamic DT990 Premium	290	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Impressive, if a little lacking in dynamics	●		Open			290
Beyerdynamic iDX 120 iE	70	11.15/GT	★★★★★	Smooth and enjoyable, but the bass could be better	●		Closed			53
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	95	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £80-£150, Awards 2013	●		Closed			11
Beyerdynamic T1	880	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £800+, Awards 2010	●		Closed			350
Beyerdynamic T50P	230	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Great sounding on-ear cans	●		Closed			174



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## HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
<b>£70 and above</b>								
Beyerdynamic T51i	245	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200-£300, Awards 2014	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T51P	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A fine replacement for the T50ps, superbly entertaining	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T70	456	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Undeniably capable, but don't quite feel worth the money	●	Closed		330
Bose AE2w	200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	No aptX Bluetooth onboard, but still a very listenable pair of cans	●	Closed	●	150
Bose QuietComfort 15	280	04.12/GT	★★★★★	These noise-cancelling cans make a fine headphone solution	●	Closed	●	227
Bose QuietComfort 25	270	04.15/GT	★★★★★	Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2014	●	Closed	●	195
Bose Soundlink On-ear	220	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A talented pair of Bluetooth cans with impressive battery life	●	Closed	●	153
B&W P3	170	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Stylish and sonically talented on-ear headphones	●	Closed		130
B&W P5	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	They look fantastic and sound just as good	●	Closed		195
B&W P5 Series 2	250	02.15/FT	★★★★★	Gorgeous looks and a stunning sound, these are a great upgrade on the P5s	●	Closed		195
B&W P5 Wireless	330	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best wireless headphones £250+, Awards 2015</b>	●	Closed		195
B&W P7	330	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears, Awards 2013	●	Closed		290
Denon AH-D600	200	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Open and spacious. A crisper presentation would make this a five-star product	●	Closed		365
Etymotic Research HF2	180	08.09/FT	★★★★★	The same money buys punchier cans, but not ones that fit as well	●	Closed		26
Focal Spirit Classic	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Needs more 'oomph' to challenge the best	●	Closed		310
Focal Spirit One	200	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Refined enough, but not the most exciting	●	Closed		225
Focal Spirit One S	225	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Need a bit more clarity and sparkle to go with its lovely, balanced sound	●	Closed		180
German Maestro GMP 8.35 D	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Virtually indestructible sonic goodness	●	Closed		220
Goldring NS-1000	100	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Sweet, powerful sounding noise-cancellers	●	Closed	●	183
Grado GR8	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Precisely detailed and balanced, but they lack a certain richness	●	Open		9
Grado GS1000i	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★	For sheer, sonic pleasure these cans are stunning	●	Open		312
Grado PS1000	1700	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Undoubtedly one of the finest headphones money can buy	●	Open		500
Grado SR125e	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Open, spacious and sturdy. Great performance for the money	●	Open		363
Grado SR325e	270	10.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best home on-ears £150-£300, Awards 2015</b>	●	Open		330
Grado SR325is	300	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Expensive, but definitely worth it	●	Open		330
Grado SR80i	100	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine pair of rhythmic cans; they're money well spent	●	Open		200
Grado iGi	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Classy and compact buds	●	Closed		12
Focal Sphear	100	11.15/GT	★★★★★	The two years Focal spent developing these in-ear buds shows. They sound gorgeous	●	Closed		15
Harman/Kardon CL	170	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An impressive headphone debut for Harman/Kardon	●	Closed		195
KEF M200	150	10.13/FT	★★★★★	They don't quite set the market alight, but they are worth an audition	●	Closed		12
KEF M500	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and refined effort from KEF. Needs a touch more excitement	●	Closed		208
Klipsch Image One	140	05.11/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for those who enjoy a lot of bass	●	Closed		138
Klipsch Image X7i	170	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Klipsch has gone for energy and warmth with the X7is, and it's an addictive combo	●	Closed		16
Klipsch Mode M40	290	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Klipsch's first noise-cancelling headphones are excellent performers	●	Closed	●	356
Klipsch X11i	200	11.14/GT	★★★★★	If you are serious about portables then these in-ears need to be on your shortlist	●	Closed		10
Logitech UE 9000	300	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Could be more refined, but make up for this with bundles of energy		Closed	●	378
Lindy Premium Headphones	75	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Ideal for those unwilling to break the £100 barrier	●	Closed		225
Martin Logan Mikros 70	150	04.13/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music to be presented with a matter-of-fact approach, these are just the job	●	Closed		13
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	350	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Brilliant at what they do well	●	Closed		299
NAD Viso HP50	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising pair of cans from NAD, but the design lets them down	●	Open		453
NAD Viso HP20	130	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Timing could be tighter but these in-ears are an easy listen	●	Closed		n/a
Nocs NS400 Titanium	80	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Still great, but there's better for the money	●	Closed		12
Oppo PM-1	1100	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Oppo's first pair of headphones are a resounding success	●	Open		395
Oppo PM-3	350	09.15/FT	★★★★★	These Oppos look stunning, but rivals edge them out in terms of sonic finesse	●	Closed		320
Parrot Zik	300	07.13/FT	★★★★★	High-tech headphones that deliver a good performance	●	Closed	●	352
Phonak Audeo PFE 022	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Pacey, detailed, insightful and recommended	●	Closed	●	14
Phiaton MS300	150	02.12/ST	★★★★★	These over ears deserve careful consideration	●	Closed		140
Philips Fidelio F1	100	10.15/GT	★★★★★	The buttery-smooth sound is likeable but not without its flaws	●	Closed		155
Philips Fidelio L1	230	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Easy going and comfortable	●	Closed		272
Philips Fidelio M1	125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2013	●	Closed		166
Philips Fidelio M1MkII	135	05.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2015</b>	●	Closed		166
Philips Fidelio M2BT	185	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2014	●	Closed	●	190
Philips Fidelio S1	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Smart and non-invasive earphones. We quite like them	●	Closed		14
Philips Fidelio X1	200	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Another great set of headphones from Philips	●	Open		430
Philips Fidelio X2	230	10.15/GT	★★★★★	A classy affair that's comfortable on the ears, too. Well worth a listen	●	Open		380
Polk Ultrafocus 8000	260	04.15/GT	★★★★★	An exciting listen, but one that's a little short on refinement and balance	●	Closed	●	340
PSB M4U1	219	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than the M4U2? Close but no cigar	●	Closed		340
PSB M4U2	250	04.15/GT	★★★★★	PSB's first pair of headphones make a superb travel companion. Highly recommended	●	Closed	●	362
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	110	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Still seriously good headphones, but rivals have caught up	●	Closed		220
Sennheiser HD 558	130	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Other headphones are more skilled but these cans have a silky smooth sound	●	Open		260

## HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Sennheiser HD 598	190	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Too well-mannered for our tastes	●		Open			270
Sennheiser IE 8i	260	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but need a better tonal balance	●		Closed			18
Sennheiser IE 80	270	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Expensive, but a truly quality option	●		Closed			5
Sennheiser IE 800	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best in-ears £300+, Awards 2015</b>	●		Closed			8
Sennheiser MM 400-X	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2012	●		Closed		●	105
Sennheiser MM 70s	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An unassuming pair of earphones that are never less than engaging	●		Closed			13
Sennheiser Momentum	260	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Smooth, punchy, refined all-rounders	●		Closed			190
Sennheiser Momentum 2.0	270	07.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best portable on-ears £200-£300, Awards 2015</b>	●		Closed			240
Sennheiser Momentum M2 IEi	90	02.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best in-ears £50-£100, Awards 2015. Product of the Year</b>	●		Closed			16
Sennheiser Momentum On-ears	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable pair of cans, just lacking a little presence in the mid-range	●		Closed			160
Sennheiser Mom. 2.0 Wireless	380	05.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best noise-cancelling headphones £250+, Awards 2015</b>	●		Closed	●	●	260
Sennheiser RS 160	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	An exciting, affordable option but tiring over longer periods	●		Closed		●	226
Sennheiser RS 180	185	05.10/GT	★★★★★	These comfortable, wireless headphones justify their premium price	●		Open		●	204
Sennheiser Urbanite	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Stylish but not quite as expressive when it comes to sound	●		Open			260
Sennheiser Urbanite XL	200	05.15/GT	★★★★★	XL in terms of size, their relaxed, unfussy approach to sound makes for a good option	●		Closed			313
Sennheiser X 320	70	10.12/ST	★★★★★	The best Xbox gaming headphones we've heard so far	●		Closed			280
Shure SE425	200	04.13/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best in-ears £100-£300, Awards 2015</b>	●		Closed			32
Shure SE846	950	06.14/FT	★★★★★	The most capable in-ears we've heard	●		Closed			36
Shure SRH1540	400	10.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best home on-ears £300+, Awards 2015</b>	●		Closed			286
Sony MDR-1R	210	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Detailed and airy, but need more kick	●		Closed			240
Sony MDR-1A	170	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles aside, these stylish and comfy cans bear up to closer inspection	●		Closed			225
SoundMagic HP150	170	10.15/GT	★★★★★	Not perfect – the midrange needs more solidity – but they're a decent pair of cans	●		Closed			286
Ultrasonics HFI-580	125	11.10/GT	★★★★★	Not class-leading, but still worthy of consideration	●		Closed			285
Ultrasonics HFI-780	160	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and bold, and offer excitement in spades	●		Open			285

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## Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
<b>Up to £500</b>												
Denon CEOL RCD-N8	350	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An attractive option if you're looking for a compact system that does a bit of everything	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Denon D-M39DAB	310	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best music system up to £400, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Denon D-M40DAB	350	10.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best music system under £400, Awards 2015. Product of the Year</b>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Marantz M-CR610	435	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2013	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Onkyo CR-N755	300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best networked micro system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pioneer X-HM70	350	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but gets much right	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ruark Audio R2 Mk3	400	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best all-in-one music system, Awards 2015</b>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-232	300	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Harsh treble docks it a star but it's an impressively compact micro system	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Yamaha R-N500	350	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Stacked with features, the R-N500 is good value for money	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<b>£500 and above</b>												
Cabasse Stream3	850	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Hardware is great but the app needs developing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Cambridge Audio Minxi	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2015</b>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Cyrus Lyric 09	3000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
HRT Stage	1200	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Limited inputs and a low-rent feel, but judged on sound alone and it's fantastic	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Linn Akurate Exakt/Akudorik	17500	03.15/FT	★★★★★	A highly capable package in which the Akudorik speakers excel	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Linn Majik DSM	2965	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A thoughtfully designed system and a pleasure to use	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Marantz M-CR611	500	11.15/FT	★★★★★	Despite the smorgasbord of features, the CR611's sound doesn't quite engage us	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

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## STEREO SYSTEMS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
McIntosh MXA70	5995	02.15/FT	★★★★★								
Pioneer P1DAB	550	07.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ruark Audio R4i	599	07.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SonoroSTEREO	500	06.15/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sony CMT-G2BNiP	500	04.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●



## Surround systems

This category includes a wide variety of systems. Most include a disc drive and now tend to feature video and music streaming capabilities. The speakers supplied tend to either be small satellite designs, or towers that usually provide greater scale and sonic authority.

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
<b>Up to £500</b>										
Panasonic SC-BTT460	350	06.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	0	5.1
Philips HTS5563	400	08.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
Pioneer BCS-SC626	400	01.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		2	2	2.1
Q Acoustics Q-TV2	150	11.09/FT	★★★★★					1	0	2.1
Samsung HT-E5530	450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
<b>£500-£1000</b>										
Harman-Kardon BDS-570	750	04.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●		2	3	5.1
LG BH8220B	600	08.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
LG BH9520TW	600	11.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	2	9.1
Panasonic SC-BTT590	500	08.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N7100W	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N5200W	500	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
<b>£1000 and above</b>										
Harman-Kardon BDS 477	1100	01.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●		0	3	2.1



## Soundbars &amp; Soundbases

One-box speaker systems that include amplification, and are a great alternative to a full-on home cinema package if you don't have much space. Soundbases have emerged as alternatives in the market, a one-box unit that can sit beneath and support your television.

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Disc drive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £2000</b>											
Arcam Solo bar	800	03.15/FT	★★★★★				4	1	1		13x100x11
Bose Solo 15 Soundstage	400	06.15/ST	★★★★★				0	1	1	●	8x63x36
Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2	1650	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●			3	1	0		13x110x18
Cambridge Audio TV2	200	06.15/ST	★★★★★				0	1	0	●	12x53x33
Cambridge Audio TV5	250	06.15/ST	★★★★★				0	1	0	●	10x73x34
Canton DM 50	400	09.14/GT	★★★★★				0	1	1		6.5x54.5x30
Canton DM 55	330	11.15/FT	★★★★★				0	1	1	●	7x55x30
Canton DM 75	450	06.15/ST	★★★★★				0	1	1	●	7x73x32
Canton DM 90.2	1100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●			0	2	2		15x90x30
Dali Kubik One	800	01.15/FT	★★★★★				0	2	0	●	15x98x10
Focal Dimension	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★				1	1	0		12x116x12
Geneva Model Cinema	550	06.15/ST	★★★★★				0	1	1	●	10x70x35
JBL Cinema Base	300	01.15/FT	★★★★★				0	1	0		10x60x40

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## SOUNDBARS &amp; SOUNDBASES continued

SOUNDBARS & SOUNDBASES continued					Disc drive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict									
Up to £2000												
Klipsch R-20B	700	02.15/FT	★★★★★	A good soundbar with a powerful sound. Rivals edge it out on balance and detail, though	●	0	1	0	●			10x102x7
Sony HT-XT1	230	06.15/ST	★★★★★	Lacks refinement but counters with a punchy sound			3	1	0			7x72x31
JBL Cinema SB200	200	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A very good single-bar solution to boost your TV sound			0	1	0			12x90x10
JBL Cinema SB 350	350	12.14/ST	★★★★★	Stiff competition prevents this immersive sounding soundbar from getting five stars	●	1	1	0				8x100x6
JBL Cinema SB400	450	06.13/ST	★★★★★	A good-looking, capable alternative to TV speakers	●	3	1	0				10x110x6
LG NB3530A	190	03.14/ST	★★★★★	An admirable and attractive soundbar from LG, but it's up against fierce competition	●	0	2	0				71x95x50
LG NB4530A	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Plenty of features married with excellent sound	●	1	1	0				8x104x4
Libratone Diva	650	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Connection issues aside, this is a strong one-box system with streaming options aplenty	●		0	1	0			16x99x10
Maxell MXSP-SB3000	220	02.14/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable performer with some impressive features			3	1	1			8x94x39
Monitor Audio ASB-2	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Still great but new competition takes its toll	●		3	1	1	●		101x119x17
Orbitsound M9	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Given its size, the M9 is an impressive performer	●		0	1	0			9x30x10
Philips HTL5120	250	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A stonking soundbar for only £250			2	1	0			15x101x8
Philips HTL5140	270	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £300, Awards 2014	●		1	1	0			5x105x7
Philips HTL9100	600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £400-£800, Awards 2013	●		2	1	1			7x103x16
Pioneer SBX-N700	250	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented subwoofer with an exhaustive feature set. And now with a price cut	●	●	0	2	0			9x90x12
Polk Audio N1	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A sizeable soundbar with an appealing sound			0	1	1			10x99x11
Q Acoustics Media 4	330	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar under £500, Awards 2015. Product of the Year			0	1	0	●		11x14x100
Samsung HW-H550	310	12.14/ST	★★★★★	A soundbar that combines decent design with good performance	●		1	1	0			6x94x6
Sandstrøm S42SWLH13	150	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking soundbar with plenty of connections	●		2	1	0			11x90x5
Sonos Playbar	600	01.15/ST	★★★★★	An impressive soundbar that produces fantastic surround sound	●		0	1	0			9x90x14
Tannoy BaseStation One	350	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Tannoy's first soundbase may not be a class-leader, but it has a great sound				1	0	●		12x64x36
TechniSat Audio Master BT	350	08.15/FT	★★★★★	An excellent soundbase that shines amid tough competition			0	1	1			7x55x30
Toshiba SB3950M1	190	12.14/ST	★★★★★	Nails the basics of sound quality and user-friendliness	●		2	1	0	●		9x90x6
Yamaha SRT-1000	300	06.15/ST	★★★★★	There's a lot to like but the excitement levels could use a boost			0	2	1			8x78x37
Yamaha YSP-1400	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Brings big sound to a smaller budget			0	1	1	●		10x100x13
Yamaha YSP-2500	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbar £600+, Awards 2014	●		1	2	1	●		7x94x14



## Media servers

These have hard drives built in. Go for the largest storage possible as that leaves room for future expansion of your music and video library.

## Our recommendations

Our Recommendations					Hard drive capacity	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Product	£	Tested	Verdict												
Up to £3000															
Lacie Lacinema Classic HD	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	As good as Apple TV, this needs to be auditioned	1TB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3		24/92	●
Microsoft Xbox 360 (250GB)	200	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Now an appealing media hub as well	250GB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	●	16/48	●
Netgear EVA9000	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Needs better sound and Apple TV-like usability	500GB	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	●	24/92	●
Olive 4HD	2150	02.10/FT	★★★★★	This is 21st-century hi-fi at its best	2TB	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	●	24/192	
Raumfeld 3Raumfeld	1680	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous product to make Sonos sweat	160GB	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	●	24/96	



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## Media streamers

These access the music or video files you have stored on your network. Check for file compatibility and decent control apps that improve usability.

### The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Pioneer N-50A**

Awards 2015: Best streamer up to £500



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Cambridge Audio CXN**

Awards 2015: Best streamer £500-£1000



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Cyrus Stream Xa**

Awards 2015: Best streamer £1000-£1500

### Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
<b>Up to £500</b>														
Amazon Fire TV	80	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A great streaming media player... if you're an Amazon customer	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Amazon Fire TV (2015)	80	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best streaming box, Awards 2015</b>	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	●	16/48	●
Amazon Fire TV Stick	35	06.15/FT	★★★★★	Like the Fire TV this is a great streamer. Super speedy, too	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Apple TV (2014)	80	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A limited but likeable streamer from Apple	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Bluesound Node	400	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2014	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	●
Bluesound Node 2	435	11.15/GT	★★★★★	Bluesound hasn't rested on its laurels with the impressive Node 2	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	●	24/192	●
Cabasse Stream Source	300	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A decent streamer at a more-than-fair price, but the competition in this area is fierce	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	●	24/96	●
Google Chromecast	30	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A neat and effective media streamer that's an absolute bargain	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Now TV	10	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Still offers great value for money but rivals have the edge over it	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Pure Jonga T2	130	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Cheaper than Sonos but comes with a few niggles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
QED uPlay Stream	150	03.14/FT	★★★★★	A handy device that boasts decent sound and good features	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	24/196	●
Roku 2	70	09.15/FT	★★★★★	Roku's best-value streaming box deserves plenty of plaudits	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	16/48	●
Roku 2 XS	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A family friendly streamer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	16/48	●
Roku 3	100	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but good features and speedy operation make this a winner	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	16/48	●
Roku Streaming Stick	40	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Not the smoothest streaming stick around, but Roku's effort is a great try	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Sonos Play 3	259	12.11/ST	★★★★★	A cracking little performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/44.1	●
Sonos Play 5	349	12.11/ST	★★★★★	An ideal one-box network player	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/44.1	●
<b>£500-£1000</b>														
Bluesound Powernode	600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A superb way for hi-fi fans and audiophiles to get their high-res kicks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	24/192	●
Cambridge CXN	700	07.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best streamer £500-£1000, Awards 2015. Product of the Year</b>	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	●	24/192	●
Camb.Audio Stream Magic 6 V2	700	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2014	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/96	●
Pioneer N-50A	500	05.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best streamer under £500, Awards 2015</b>	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192	●
<b>£1000 and above</b>														
Burmester Musiccenter 151	12500	08.15/FT	★★★★★	A brilliant streamer with the added benefit of CD playback	0	0	0	0	1	1	5	●	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream Xa	1250	05.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best streamer £1000 - £1500, Awards 2015</b>	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream XP	2000	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2500, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	●
Cyrus Streamline	1600	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Can work wonders with a digital music collection	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx	2010	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streaming system £1500+, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	●
Linn Kiko	2500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2013	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	●	24/192	●
Naim NAC-N 172 XS	1650	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	0	2	0	0	2	2	1	●	24/192	●
Naim ND5 XS	2245	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best streamer £1500+, Awards 2015</b>	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	●
Naim NDS/555PS	12620	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Engaging sound, bags of detail and many features	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	●
Naim NDX	2995	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £2500+, Awards 2011	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	●	24/192	●
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2011	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	●
Naim Uniti 2	2795	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Uniti continues to lead the market at this price	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	●
Naim UnitiLite	1650	12.12/FT	★★★★★	UnitiLite hits the streaming sweet spot	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	●
Naim UnitiQute 2	1295	09.13/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best music system £800-£1500, Awards 2015</b>	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	●	32/192	●
Pioneer N-70A	1000	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A contender that delivers the goods but still comes up a bit short	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	●	32/384	●
Pixel Magic Lumin	5000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine player that leads the field in terms of file compatibility	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	●	24/192	●
Sony HAP-Z1ES	2000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A smartly designed, superb-sounding piece of hi-fi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	24/192	●



# Recorded music is at a crossroads

The format in which you listen to your music could be undermining the quality of your hi-fi system

For those of us that consider themselves a music lover, albeit to different degrees, we are part of a very fortunate generation. We now have access to an ever-growing wealth of recorded music of extraordinary range and depth, effectively accumulated over the last 60 years. With the introduction of the microgroove LP record in the early 1950's, playback quality took a quantum leap forward and this also coincided with a far higher standard of recording techniques. Although further improvements have been made over the years, this was a watershed time that first introduced hi-fi as a reality.

We now have literally millions of recorded music tracks available to us in all genres and many different formats. One trend over recent years, however, has been to deliberately downgrade the quality in order to offer quantity. The main culprits have been MP3 and AAC formats which were designed as a low cost form of delivery when download speeds were slow and computer chip memory was expensive. Neither now applies and both formats should be consigned to history.

## Quality vs quantity

Let us explain. The maximum resolution from MP3 and AAC file formats, which are both highly compressed, is 320 kbps (kilobytes per second) which compares with CD quality of 1411 kbps. This means the resolution quality is less than



a quarter of that provided by a standard CD. However, most MP3 or AAC files are downloaded over the internet and the most used download resolution is 128 kbps, which is around one-eleventh of CD quality. This should ring alarm bells. If you are only playing back these tracks on an iPod or mobile phone with a pair of earbuds, the quality may be irrelevant to you. But if these tracks are your primary source of music, perhaps with an iPod dock into a decent hi-fi system, you are only making a very poor quality sound louder. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. The quality will be very poor in contrast with a full resolution version even if you are completely unaware of the loss you are inflicting upon yourself. This can even affect the type of music listened to

as most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file will have so much information missing, and all the complexities of the music lost, with the end result that the recording is reduced to just the essence of a tune.

## What is the future of recorded music?

There are now positive signs for the future of recorded music. Audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, have been very important to the music industry as they are generally avid music lovers who aim to maximise their enjoyment by listening to music at its best quality level, which

means the play-back of great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without them, a main driver for quality would probably be removed from the music industry. They have always sought out quality but there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm with this greater awareness of the tremendous quality benefit. Consumers will vote through their purchases and will seek out higher resolution recordings. Look at Qobuz for a new high-profile entry into this field who offer CD quality (16 bit/44.1 kHz FLAC) streaming for over 15 million tracks.

## The benefits of using a specialist dealer

Specialist hi-fi dealers are also a significant driver for maintaining high quality in the music industry. Hi-end hi-fi very soon exposes poor quality recordings and specialist hi-fi dealers are constantly assessing the relative merits of different brands from manufacturers for potential stocking. With specialist hi-fi dealers, achieving the best system performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations is almost invariably both their hobby and their livelihood. Without them, hi-fi manufacturers and potential customers would have to rely on the opinion of magazine reviewers to assess levels of performance – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. For specialist hi-fi dealers, their relationship with audiophiles and hi-fi connoisseurs is also crucial to them for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers (and the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest) are essential to each other.

Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. They also appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver a powerful emotional experience. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase by choosing a specialist dealer, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

“...there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm.”

Listed below is our selection of **THE BEST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK**. They have been chosen because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

## Our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

### SOUTH

**Ashford, Kent**  
**SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI**  
40 High Street.  
t: 01233 624441  
www.soundcraftifi.com

**Chelmsford**  
**RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION**

216 Moulsham Street.  
t: 01245 265245  
www.rayleighhifi.com

**Kingston-upon-Thames**  
**INFIDELITY**

9 High Street,  
Hampton Wick.  
t: 020 8943 3530  
www.infidelity.co.uk

**Maidenhead**  
**AUDIO VENUE**  
36 Queen Street.  
t: 01628 633995  
www.audiovenue.com

**Norwich**  
**MARTINS HI-FI**  
85-91 Ber Street.  
t: 01603 627134  
www.martinshifi.co.uk

**Rayleigh**  
**RAYLEIGH HI-FI**  
44a High Street.  
t: 01268 779762  
www.rayleighhifi.com

**Southend-on-Sea**  
**RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION**  
132/4 London Road.  
t: 01702 435255  
www.rayleighhifi.com

### LONDON

**Ealing**  
**AUDIO VENUE**  
27 Bond Street.  
t: 020 8567 8703  
www.audiovenue.com

**N1**  
**GRAHAMS HI-FI**  
190a New North Road.  
t: 020 7226 5500  
www.grahams.co.uk

**SW11**  
**ORANGES & LEMONS**  
61/63 Webbs Road.  
t: 020 7924 2040  
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

**SOUTH WEST**  
**Bath**  
**AUDIENCE**  
14 Broad Street.  
t: 01225 333310  
www.audience.org.uk

**Cinderford**  
**CERITECH AUDIO**  
1 Pavilion Business Park,  
Speculation Road.  
t: 01600 716362  
www.ceritech-audio.co.uk

**Exeter**  
**GULLIFORD HI-FI**  
97 Sidwell Street.  
t: 01392 491194  
www.gullifordhifi.co.uk

### MIDLANDS

**Banbury**  
**OVERTURE**  
3 Church Lane.  
t: 01295 272158  
www.overture.co.uk

**Coventry**  
**FRANK HARVEY**  
163 Spon Street.  
t: 024 7652 5200  
www.frankharvey.co.uk

**Leicester**  
**CYMBIOSIS**  
8 Brook Park,  
Gaddesby Lane.  
t: 0333 200 4475  
www.cymbiosis.com

**NORTH**  
**Chester**  
**ACOUSTICA**  
17 Hoole Road.  
t: 01244 344227  
www.acoustica.co.uk

**Gateshead**  
**LINTONE AUDIO**  
7-11 Park Lane.  
t: 0191 477 4167  
www.lintone.co.uk

**Hull**  
**THE AUDIO ROOM**  
Savile Street, Hull  
t: 01482 891375  
www.theaudiroom.co.uk

**York**  
**SOUND ORGANISATION**  
2 Gillygate.  
t: 01904 627108  
www.soundorg.co.uk

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### STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY .....	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE .....	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES .....	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT .....	★ ★ ★ ★ ★





## Set-top boxes

<b>Freeview</b>	Large choice of digital TV channels via a rooftop aerial
<b>Freesat</b>	Much like Freeview, but takes signal from a satellite dish
<b>Subscription</b>	Services from Sky and Virgin give a vast array of premium content

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Freeview	Freesat	Sky	Virgin	YouView	Tuners	Hard drive capacity (GB)	HDMI out	Smart
<b>Up to £500</b>													
BT Ultra HD box	n/a	11.15/FT	★★★★★	The HD content looks a bit soft but the Ultra HD picture is revelatory. Just needs more content							n/a	1TB	1
Humax DTR-T2000	180	11.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best PVR, Awards 2015</b>	●					●	2	500	1
Humax DTR-T1010 (500GB)	230	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2013						●	2	500	1
Humax HDR-1000S (500GB)	220	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freesat recorder, Awards 2013		●					2	500	1
Icecrypt T2400 (2TB)	330	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Loads of storage, but could do with more features	●						2	2TB	1
Sky+ HD 2TB	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best subscription service, Awards 2015. Product of the Year</b>			●				2	1TB	1
Sony SVR-HDT1000	300	12.11/GT	★★★★★	One to appeal to the 'bigger is better' crowd	●						2	1TB	1
Virgin Media TiVo	200	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best cable recorder, Awards 2011				●			3	1TB	1



## Portable music players

A category of products that has been put under increasing pressure by the rise of the ubiquitous smartphone. At the most basic level it will be a standard music player that can be used in the gym. Higher-end machines will add video, internet browsing and apps as well.

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Web browsing	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
<b>Up to £1000</b>									
Acoustic Research M2	900	06.15/FT	★★★★★	Expensive, but this is the best high-res player we've heard so far	5	720x1280	64		137x71x15
Astell & Kern AK100 MkII	700	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A few design issues mar a very talented performer	2.5	320x240	32		79x59x15
Astell & Kern AK Jr	400	10.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best portable music player, Awards 2015. Product of the Year</b>	3.1	240x400	64		117x53x9
Apple iPod Nano 16GB (2012)	130	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple, attractive, music-playing wonder	2.5	240x240	16		77x40x5
Apple iPod Shuffle 2GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Simple and brilliantly effective	n/a	n/a	2		30x30x10
Apple iPod Touch 64GB (2012)	330	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best iPod Touch so far, but it's fast becoming niche	4	1136x640	64	●	123x59x6
Cowon Z2	200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A great music player with good sound and flexible storage	3.7	800x480	16	●	116x63x12
FiiO X5	290	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A bulky design gives way to a strong, if not outstanding music player	2.4	400x360	n/a		114x68x16
iBasso DX50	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable and affordable. However it's not the last word in sound quality	1	96x96	8		60x40x20
SanDisk Sansa Clip+ 8GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A worthy Apple alternative	2.4	320x240	8		106x64x17
Sony NWZ-A15	170	12.14/FT	★★★★★	A good place to start if you're looking to get into hi-res	2.2	320x240	16		109x44x9
Sony NWZ-ZX1	550	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A seriously impressive first attempt at a premium high-res audio player	4	854x480	128	●	123x61x16
Sony NW-ZX2	950	09.15/FT	★★★★★	Though the sound could use a touch more fun, this is still an impressive hi-res player	4	854x480	128		131x65x19



## Tablets

<b>Android</b>	Offers great flexibility and innovation
<b>Apple iOS</b>	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
<b>Windows</b>	New kid on the block. Watch this space

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
<b>Up to £600</b>											
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A great option for those looking for a user-friendly tablet	Android	●		7	1280x800	16/32	193x137x10
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An excellent tablet but Android fans might find it a little restrictive	Android	●		7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9	330	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A strong performer but the Kindle Fire still feels a little restrictive	Android	●		8.9	2560x1600	16/32/64	231x158x8
Asus VivoTab ME400	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A convincing rival to the Microsoft Surface in the Windows 8 space	Windows 8	●		10.1	1366x768	32/64	263x171x10
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	430	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Apple hits the bullseye. Again	iOS	●		7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	320	01.14/ST	★★★★★	An absolutely superb tablet that shows its rivals how it's done	iOS	●		7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad mini 4	320	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best tablet under 8in, Awards 2015</b>	iOS	●		7.9	2048x1536	16/64/128	203x135x6
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2013	iOS	●		9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9

## TABLETS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Apple iPad Air	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2014	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8
Apple iPad Air 2	400	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best tablet 8in+, Awards 2015. Product of the Year	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/64/128	240x170x6
Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime	500	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A slim and smart tablet that we love	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Asus Transformer Pad Infinity	600	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A very capable iPad alternative and one of the best android tablets	Android	●	10.1	1900x1200	32/64	263x181x9
Google Nexus 7	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to £300, Awards 2012	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	199x120x11
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to 8in, Awards 2014	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9
Google Nexus 10	319	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Great performance and price: a real iPad-botherer	Android	●	10	2560x1600	16/32	264x178x9
LG G Pad	260	01.14/ST	★★★★★	Looks the part but struggles against its price rivals	Android	●	8.3	1920x1200	16	216x127x8
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	450	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great screen that's let down by a cluttered interface	Android	●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8
Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 7.0	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Find it for the right price and it's a capable all-rounder	Android	●	7	1024x600	8/16	190x120x10
Samsung Galaxy Tab S 8.4	320	01.15/GT	★★★★★	The best tablet we've tested from Samsung so far	Android	●	8.4	2560x1600	16/32	213x126x7
Sony Xperia Tablet S	330	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of potential, but there are niggles	Android	●	9.4	1280x800	16/32	240x170x10
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	399	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, but there are tablets out there for less money	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x69
Sony Xperia Tablet Z2	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Another solid effort, but doesn't do quite enough against the iPad	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x64
Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact	330	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A superb tablet that's terrific with music and video	Android	●	8	1920x1200	16/32	213x124x6
Sony Xperia Z4 Tablet	499	ONLINE	★★★★★	Offers an excellent screen, superb sound and well thought-out features	Android	●	10.1	2500x1600	32	254x167x6
Tesco Hudl 2	130	01.15/FT	★★★★★	There's little to grumble about at this price, a nifty budget tablet	Android	●	8.3	1920x1200	16	128x224x9



## Smartphones

Android	Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows	New kid on the block. Watch this space

## The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Samsung Galaxy S6**  
Supertest 08.15 ★★★★★



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Apple iPhone 6S**  
Awards 2015: Best smartphone under 5.5in



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge+**  
Awards 2015: Best smartphone above 5.5in

## Also consider

Product	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Alcatel OneTouch Idol 3 (4.7)	08.15/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.7	1280x720	8/16	135x66x8
Apple iPhone 5S	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	iOS	●	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Apple iPhone 6	08.15/ST	★★★★★	iOS	●	●	4.7	1334x750	16/32/128	138x67x7
Apple iPhone 6S	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone under 5in, Awards 2015. Product of the Year	iOS	●	4.7	1334x750	16/64/128	138x67x7
Apple iPhone 6 Plus	12.14/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●	●	5.5	1920x1080	16/64/128	158x78x7
Google Nexus 5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Google Nexus 6	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.96	1440x2560	32/64	160x83x10
HTC One (M8)	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One M9	08.15/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5	1920x1080	32	145x70x10
HTC One Max	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	165x82x10
HTC 8S	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Windows	●	●	4.7	800x480	4	121x63x10
Huawei P8	08.15/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/64	145x72x6
LG G3	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.5	2560x1440	16/32	146x75x9
LG G4	08.15/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.5	2560x1440	32	149x76x10
LG G Flex	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
LG G Flex 2	07.15/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.5	1920x1080	16/32	149x752x9
Motorola Moto X (2014)	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	141x72x10
Nokia Lumia 930	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Windows	●	●	5	1920x1080	32	137x71x10
Opportunity N1	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	171x83x9



## SMARTPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (wxd, mm)
Samsung Galaxy Note III		05.14/ST	★★★★★	The original phablet, updated and still the best	Android	●	5.7	1920x1080	32	151x80x8
Samsung Galaxy Note 4		12.14/GT	★★★★★	The fourth iteration of the Galaxy Note and it's the best one yet	Android	●	5.7	1440x2560	16/32	154x79x9
Samsung Galaxy S III		08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2012	Android	●	4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S5		07.14/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the S4, but not radical enough	Android	●	5.1	1920x1080	16/32	142x73x8
Samsung Galaxy S6		08.15/ST	★★★★★	The S6 sets a high bar for phones in 2015. It's a stunning effort	Android	●	5.1	2560x1440	32/64/128	143x71x7
Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge		06.15/FT	★★★★★	A few minor complaints can't mar what is a truly excellent handset	Android	●	5.1	2560x1440	32/64	149x76x10
Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge+	Online	★★★★★	Best smartphone above 5.5in, Awards 2015	Android	●	5.7	2560x1440	32/64	154x76x7	
Sony Xperia T		01.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-rounder for music and movie lovers	Android	●	4.55	1280x720	16	129x67x9
Sony Xperia Z		07.13/GT	★★★★★	A triumph for Sony – one capable of taking the fight to Google	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	139x71x8
Sony Xperia Z1		03.14/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, a speedy, sleek and impressive smartphone	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
Sony Xperia Z2		07.14/GT	★★★★★	The phone to beat in 2014. Outstanding	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	147x73x8
Sony Xperia Z3		12.14/GT	★★★★★	Best phone 5in+, Awards 2014	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	146x72x7



## HDMI cables

Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
<b>Up to £80</b>					
Audioquest Pearl	23	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1 1.4
Cambridge Audio 500 (5m)	69	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly acceptable cable for the money	5 1.3a
QED HDMI-P	50	11.08/FT	★★★★★	This award winning cable just got better	1 1.3
QED Performance HDMI	70	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Capable performer – finely balanced sound and a wonderfully rendered picture	3 1.3
QED Profile HDMI	25	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1 1.4
QED Qunex HDMI-P (5M)	75	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic picture quality mated with a dynamic and powerful sound	5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI	5	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Brilliant way to spend a fiver - will give rivals up to £20 something to think about	1.5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI (5m)	10	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A no-brainer for those on a tight budget	5 1.3a
Vivanco Sound and Image	30	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A respectable upgrade, it provides greater fidelity in sound and vision over budget cables	2 1.3
Wireworld Island 6	46	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Packs a firm punch and strong dynamics	1.4 2.0
<b>£80 and above</b>					
Audioquest Cinnamon	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A top-notch HDMI that's a credit to any system	2 1.4
Audioquest Forest	80	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A true and worthy rival to Chord's Supershield	5 1.4
Audioquest HDMI-X	95	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A real entertainer – chunky bass and images are well defined	3 1.3
Chord Company Active	115	10.09/GT	★★★★★	Muscular-sounding and excellent in every regard	1.5 1.3
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	90	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A punchy award winner that defies its low price tag	5 1.3a
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra	110	09.08/GT	★★★★★	This Ecosse gives a punchy, powerful performance with great detail levels	5 1.3
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra +	169	09.08/GT	★★★★★	With its punchy, powerful and composed production, this cable oozes dynamics	5 1.3
QED Reference	125	06.10/GT	★★★★★	An assured, but expensive, performer	5 1.3a
van den Hul Flat 180	90	10.09/GT	★★★★★	Typical van den Hul quality from a hinged cable that doesn't fall out of its socket	2 1.3b
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	105	03.09/GT	★★★★★	One of the best HDMI cables we've ever heard	3 1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	300	10.08/FT	★★★★★	It's pricey, but has good performance	1 1.3



## Digital interconnects

USB	An increasingly common way to connect your computer to your hi-fi
Optical	Digital cable that uses light to transmit sound between components
Coaxial	Sends audio via an electrical signal between your hi-fi and AV kit

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
<b>Up to £50</b>					
Audioquest Forest USB 1.5	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Got a budget laptop and a budget DAC? This cable is ideal for connecting them	USB 1.5
Atlas Fibre Optic	32	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine, substantial, budget cable choice	Optical 1



## AWARD WINNING Hi-Fi CABLES

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2012  
CABLES & ACCESSORIES  
BEST HI-FI CABLE  
AUDIOQUEST PEARL



3D  
READY

**Audioquest Pearl HDMI Cable**  
Prices From £22.50

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2014  
Accessories  
Best Hi-Fi Component  
Atlas Element Audio Cable



**Atlas Element Audio Cable**  
Prices From £37.00

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2012  
CABLES & ACCESSORIES  
BEST OPTICAL DIGITAL CABLE  
QED PERFORMANCE GRAPHITE



**QED Performance Optical**  
Prices From £39.95

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2014  
Accessories  
BEST HI-FI USB/USB  
AudioQuest Dragonfly V1.2



**AudioQuest Dragonfly V1.2**  
Price £129.00

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2014  
Accessories  
Best Hi-Fi Cable  
QED XT40



NEW

**QED XT40**  
Price £10.00 per metre

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2012  
CABLES & ACCESSORIES  
BEST DIGITAL  
SUPRA USB 2.0



**AudioQuest JitterBug**  
Price £39.00

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2012  
CABLES & ACCESSORIES  
BEST DIGITAL  
SUPRA USB 2.0



**Supra USB 2.0 Cable**  
Prices From £27.00

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2010  
CABLES  
BEST HI-FI CABLE  
MERLIN TARANTULA MK6



**Merlin Tarantula MK6 Cable**  
Prices From £50.00

**SALE** SAVE UP TO  
17%



**QED Reference Digital Audio**  
Prices From £79.99

**SALE** SAVE UP TO  
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**QED Reference HDMI Cable**  
Prices From £39.99

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**QED Reference Subwoofer**  
Prices From £64.99

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**QED Reference Evolution XLR**  
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Bring your hi-fi to life with our high performance award winning cables  
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## DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
<b>Up to £50</b>					
QED Performance Coaxial	30	10.08/GT	★★★★★	Best coaxial digital cable, Awards 2012	Co-axial 1
QED Performance Graphite	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best optical digital cable, Awards 2012	Optical 1
Supra USB 2.0	29	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2012	USB 1
Wireworld Nova 6	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Like an up-and-coming band: unrefined but likeable and energetic	Optical 1
<b>£50 and above</b>					
Audioquest Cinnamon	60	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Like a fine paintbrush: controlled and delicate but lacking the big, broad strokes of a roller	USB 1.5
Atlas Equator Optical	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Worth checking out, but not for the basshunters	Optical 1
Chord Company Optichord	51	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Confident, competent and extremely likeable. Highly recommended	Optical 1
Chord Co. Prodac Pro Digital	70	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Even better following an upgrade to its plugs	Co-axial 1
Ecosse The Director SE	89	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Spacious sounding and great with higher frequencies	Co-axial 1
Furutech Formula 2	55	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2011	USB 1.2
Kimber USB	52	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Worth an audition if you're after something laid-back	USB 1
QED U Play (Bluetooth)	65	05.10/FT	★★★★★	It's small, cheap, and does an efficient job	Bluetooth 10
Vertere Pulse D-Fi	70	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A must-audition if you can stretch your budget	USB 1



## Analogue interconnects

These carry audio signal from source to amplifier, or between pre-amplifier and power amplifier. Some use a shielding construction to reduce external electrical interference

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced)	Length tested (m)
<b>Up to £50</b>					
Atlas Element Integra (1m)	45	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best analogue interconnect, Awards 2014	● 1
Black Rhodium Twist	36	06.14/GT	★★★★★	We wouldn't recommend this cable for bright-sounding systems but it's a decent option for the money	● 1
Chord C-Line	45	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best analogue interconnect, Awards 2015</b>	● 1
Clear. Aud. C-line Alpha One	30	12.11/FT	★★★★★	A bargain interconnect that should be on your shortlist	● 1
Ecosse Conductor CA1.2	49	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with detail - a good all-rounder	● 1
Ecosse The Composer	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Lacks excitement, but a lovely design with warm and punchy sounds	● 0.8
Merlin Mozart	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Open and exuberant, if lacking in warmth	● 1
QED Performance Audio 2	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Agile, fun and nuanced: would do well in pretty much any system	● 1
QED Profile	18	06.11/GT	★★★★★	At the top of the first upgrade tree	● ● 1
Wireworld Luna	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with subtlety and dynamics: should be on any interconnect shortlist	● 1
Wireworld Luna 7	40	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Delivers a confident and likable sound. A great option at this price	● 1
<b>£50 and above</b>					
Atlas Equator Integra	75	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A recommended second-upgrade cable	● ● 1
AudioQuest Red River	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	What it lacks in smoothness and subtlety, it makes up for in scale and dynamics	● 1

What Hi-Fi Sound & Vision, Sept 2015



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## ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced) Length tested (m)
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	125	11.11/FT	★★★★★	New plugs make these even more essential	● 1
Chord Company Cobra VEE 3	95	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Clear and detailed, this cable brings a very driven and focused feel to music	● 1
Chord Company Indigo Plus	995	05.09/FT	★★★★★	It's genius in an interconnect - but you need the right system	● 1
Chord Crimson Vee3	50	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A nice, easy-going cable that's a little too restrained	● 1
Furutech Alpha Line-1	80	03.11/FT	★★★★★	A cable for owners of midrange systems to get very excited by - very good indeed	● 1
QED J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Fast and agile 3.5mm-RCA cable	● 1.5
QED Reference Audio 40	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Reassuring build quality from a cable that brings fantastic depth and dimension	● 1
QED Reference Audio J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Clean sounding and packed with detail	● 1.5
van den Hul The Bay C5	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For bright-sounding systems The Bay could be the antidote	● 1
van den Hul The Name	60	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Energy and fun trump ultimate precision	● 0.8
van den Hul The Wave	100	01.09/FT	★★★★★	The Wave has a formidable array of talents and is one of the best cables at this kind of money	● 1
van den Hul The Well	100	06.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal booster for thin sounding kit	● ● 1
Wireworld Oasis 6	130	06.11/GT	★★★★★	A truly splendid cable for kit worth £800-£1000	● ● 1



## Mains products

**IEC** Usually a three-pin connector used in most hi-fi (and kettles)  
**Figure of 8** Small, two-pin connector. Tends to be used on lower-priced products  
**Blocks and conditioners** Multi-plug units, some of which attempt to filter noise out of the mains

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Cable Block Conditioner Figure of 8 (2-pin) IEC (3-pin) Number of sockets
<b>Up to £100</b>					
Clear. Aud. C-Line Alpha One	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine first stage mains cable upgrade	● ● n/a
Clear.Aud.C-L Alpha P/HUB	90	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Makes a noticeable difference, but not the last word in cohesion	● ● ● 6
Ecosse Big Orange MK2+	60	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Provides worthwhile gains in performance – and plenty of them	● ● ● n/a
Lindy 6-way	40	12.08/FT	★★★★★	For just £40, this conditioner is a bona fide system booster	● ● ● 6
Merlin Tarantula Figure '8'	40	01.11/GT	★★★★★	Incredible bang for your buck from Merlin	● ● ● n/a
Merlin Tarantula MK6	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	A good tweak for a hi-fi or AV system	● ● ● n/a
Russ Andrews Powerkord-8	75	01.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal choice for a simple upgrade	● ● ● n/a
Tacima CS929	40	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Explicitly illustrates the gains a modest outlay can achieve	● ● ● 6
Tacima CS947	45	09.15/GT	★★★★★	An essential upgrade for any entry-level system	● ● ● 6
<b>£100 and above</b>					
Audioquest NRG 1.5	100	01.11/GT	★★★★★	A lively and precise cable that does much right	● ● ● n/a
Atlas Eos	147	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Well-balanced, delivering impressive depth and scale	● ● ● n/a
Furutech G-320AG	165	02.11/GT	★★★★★	A pricy but worthwhile addition to your set-up	● ● ● n/a
Isotek EVO Polaris + Pre. cable	400	09.15/GT	★★★★★	Allows for a natural, fluid presentation	● ● ● 6
Olson Sound Fantastic HF6	135	09.15/GT	★★★★★	A welcome upgrade that's money well spent	● ● ● 6
Russ Andrews X2	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Effective but suffers from a lack of sockets	● ● ● 2
Russ Andrews X6	350	09.15/GT	★★★★★	Match it well and your hi-fi kit will benefit in spades	● ● ● 6



## Sound Fantastic

Olsons *Sound Fantastic* range of units are specifically designed for both the home and professional hi-fi audio markets.

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## Speaker cables

These carry the audio signal from your amplifier to your speakers. Bi-wiring uses two runs of cables per speaker and can lead to improvements in the speakers' performance

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	
<b>Up to £10/m</b>				
Audioquest FLX-SLiP 14/4	5.80	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Speaker Cable, Awards 2013
Audioquest G4	4.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses out when it comes to the weight and solidity of its sound. Exciting and articulate nonetheless
Audioquest X2	5	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly smooth and even-handed sounding performer
Atlas Equator 2.0 OFC	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Allows for an impressive sense of weight and power, but doesn't quite match its rivals
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Slightly overtaken by newer rivals, but still a mighty fine choice
Cl. Audio C-line Alpha Shield	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Restrained dynamics hold this otherwise good cable back from the full five stars
Ecosse CS 2.3	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Balanced, nuanced and an easy listen, but a little subdued
Ecosse CS 4.2	3	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A decent cable that needs a touch more punch
QED Ruby Anniversary	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Rich and detailed but lacking in rhythm and dynamics
QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Rich, detailed, energetic and clean. A great cable
QED X-TC	4	09.10/FT	★★★★★	A great budget cable that's able to hold its own
Wireworld Luna 7	6.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	The all-round ability of this cable means it should sit well with a wide range of systems
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Still a cracking cable, but losing out to better competition
Wireworld Stream 7	6	11.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're a fan of detail then you should definitely consider the Stream 7

Biwire

**"Detail, space, frequency range... if the Clearway were lacking in those respects it wouldn't be given five stars"**

Best speaker cable, Awards 2015

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**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2014



**QED XT40**  
Price £10.00 per metre

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
★★★★★  
October 2012



**Atlas Equator 2.0**  
Price £6.00 per metre

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
★★★★★  
March 2014



**Van Den Hul The Clearwater**  
Price £9.00 per metre

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
★★★★★  
March 2014



**Wireworld Luna 7**  
Price £6.50 per metre



**Chord Clearway**  
Price £10.00 per metre

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2012  
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
(CABLES & ACCESSORIES)  
AUDIOQUEST FLX-SLIP 144



**AudioQuest FLX-SLIP Cable**  
Price £5.80 per metre

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
★★★★★  
July 2008



**Atlas Hyper 2.0**  
Price £20.00 per metre

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
★★★★★  
Jan 2008



**Ecosse MS2.4**  
Price £58.50 per metre

## TOP SELLING SPEAKER CABLES

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
★★★★★  
July 2008



**QED Silver Anniversary XT**  
Price £6.95 per metre



**Tellurium Q Black**  
Price £49.99 per metre



**Van Den Hul CS-122**  
Price £19.99 per metre



**QED Genesis Silver Spiral**  
Price £40.00

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## SPEAKERS CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	
<b>£10/m and above</b>				
Chord Clearway	10	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best speaker cable, Awards 2015. Product of the Year</b>
Ecosse MS2.4	50	01.08/FT	★★★★★	A massively detailed cable that reveals subtleties with refinement
QED XT40	10	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best speaker cable, Awards 2014
QED Revelation	15	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that should be on your audition list
QED Silver Anniv. XT Biwire	10	10.06/GT	★★★★★	A clear class-leader with exceptional sonic transparency on display
van den Hul The Clearwater	10	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A cable with an impressive level of detail and clarity

Biwire



## Speaker stands

Many stands are hollow and can be filled with sand or other similar heavy materials. This is to increase mass and dampening and the sonic benefit is tighter bass – although too much of it can be counter-productive and end up deadening the sound

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Fillable	Finishes
<b>Up to £500</b>							
Atacama Duo 6	65	02.13/GT	★★★★★	A very likable pair of speaker stands	60x31x31	●	1
Atacama Nexus 6	200	12.00/FT	★★★★★	Still fine performers despite their age	60x25x30	●	1
Atacama Moseco 6	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best speaker stand, Awards 2015</b>	60x24x28	●	4
Custom rc60 Deluxe	125	10.07/FT	★★★★★	This bespoke service has made a fine pair stands	60x20x25		5
Custom Design FS103	160	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A good pair of stands but rivals offer better overall performance	61x22x26	●	4
Custom Design FS104 Signature	200	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2013	62x16x18	●	4
Custom Design RS300	90	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Minimal design, a thoroughly appealing listen	61x22x26	●	2

## Accessories

## Best equipment support

### Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40 £450

## What is it?

It's a thing of beauty, that's what it is. Kit racks don't generally get an appreciative "ooh" out of the team, but this one did – and that's all down to its ultra high-quality build and materials.

The shelves are made from solid bamboo, and come in three shades – light, medium and a sultry dark, and are set off by the glossy black legs (available in a variety of lengths to suit your kit) and shiny steel cone caps and spikes. Even better, it's modular, too: you can add extra shelves for £150 each – so it can grow as your system does.

## Why did it win?

It saw our Cyrus CDi/Roksan Caspian M2 reference system deliver a confident, insightful and hugely enjoyable sound – with punchy bass, nuanced midrange and clear, open top-end.

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**WHAT HI-FI?**  
**AWARDS 2014**

Accessories  
Best equipment rack  
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40

## What the team say

*"It's pricier than some rivals, but we think it's well worth it for that stellar build quality and materials, not to mention the way it works with our kit"*

## SPEAKERS STANDS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Fillable	Finishes
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable listening experience that's marred by some less than appealing fuzziness	60x15x21		5
Mission Stance	100	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Will do a fine job with £200-£400 speakers	58x21x28	●	3
Partington ANSA 60	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	They remain fine stands - but no longer outstanding value	60x23x28	●	1
Part. D'nought Broadside	300	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Deliver wide ranging improvements to sound	60x23x28		1
Part. Super Dreadnought	180	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Best £100+ speaker stands in Awards 2007	60x16x17	●	1
Q Acoustics 20 speaker stands	200	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Clever construction and great performance makes these stands ideal support for all types of speakers	66.5x39x24		2
Soundstyle Z2	70	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Best sub-£100 speaker stand in Awards 2007	57x17x23	●	2



## AV &amp; hi-fi racks

Many racks are built to be expanded. Several manufacturers offer you a number of shelving options for ready-made products, but what if you want to get more kit in a few years? We like having the option to build upwards at a later date

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
<b>Up to £500</b>							
Alphason Finewood 1100	300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Looks great and provides sturdy support for your kit	3	51x110x45	1
Atacama Equinox AVI	380	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Neat solution to mount a TV above AV electronics	2	110x106x60	3
Atacama Equinox	339	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Still a good rack, but newer rivals offer more	● 2-5	Variablex60x55	3
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40	450	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2014	●	Variablex60x40	3
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40 SE	525	Aw.15/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best equipment support, Awards 2015</b>	● 1-5	Variablex60x40	3
Atacama Eris Eco 5.0	460	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2013	● 4	70x59x56	4
Custom Design Concept AV	350	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Looks and sounds excellent, plus four colour options	3	60x101x40	4
Custom Design Milan 4	470	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Small and well made, but lacks subtlety	● 4	59x57x40	5
Hi Fi Racks Podium	460	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2011	● 3	62x60x40	1
HiFi Racks Podium SL Ak. XL	260	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Easy to build and a very good deal for the good price	● 3	Variablex79.5x40	5
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	350	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple rack design with pretty decent results	4	Variablex55x40	1
Quadraspire Q4evo	380	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A solid, cohesive and supremely affordable rack	4	Variablex59x39.5	8
<b>£500-£1000</b>							
Atacama Elite Eco 12.0	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Offers solid performance and flexibility	● 5	Variablex115x32	1
BDI Valera 9724	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Complicated to assemble but the results make it worthwhile	3	54x112x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Akorner XL	930	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A corner-friendly alternative to the Podium	● 3	45x110x40	6
Quadraspire Q4 Bamboo	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	An all round performer. Easy to set up and excellent results	● 4	Variablex59x40	1
Quadraspire QAVX	560	12.07/FT	★★★★★	Supports a great big telly and expansive system	● 2	Variablex163x52	8
Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T	800	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A first-rate rack, that highlights subtleties	● 4	Variablex59x47	6
<b>£1000 and more</b>							
Hi Fi Racks Podium XL	1050	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A great performer: plenty of weight and dynamics	● 3	53x140x40	1
Spectral Closed CL1050	1100	07.07/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic build and style, plus numerous options	2	31x101x53	17
Spectral Closed CL1552	1800	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Awesome style and decent abilities - a great rack	6	VariablexVariablex53	16

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## Headphone amps

The headphone outputs on most products are usually afterthoughts and have had little care taken in trying to make them sound good. A dedicated headphone amp is a must if you want the best headphone sound

### Our recommendations

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Line level in Outputs
Up to £1500					
Acoustic Research AR-UA1	400	10.15/GT	★★★★★	There's much to admire with this headphone DAC. Although we'd expect more at this price	1 2
Apogee Grove	250	10.15/GT	★★★★★	Once it gets in the groove you won't want to stop listening	1 1
Beyerdynamic A1	975	11.10/FT	★★★★★	A formidable combo when partnered with T1 headphones	2 1
Chord Electronics Toucan	800	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A headphone amp with built in DAC that's worth a punt	2 2
Edwards Audio HA1	280	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but not that refined	2 1
FiiO E7	65	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the most cost-effective ways to improve headphone sound from a computer	1 2
Lehmann Black Cube Linear	750	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive device given the right system	1 1
Lehmann Rhineland	400	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Its user-friendly sound makes this a very wise buy	2 2
Meridian Prime	1200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class headphone amp and a talented preamp to boot	2 4
Musical Fidelity V-CAN II	120	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Does enough right to be worth serious consideration	1 3
Pathos Aurium	850	08.13/FT	★★★★★	This amplifier is a top class choice	4 2
TEACH HA-P50	200	10.15/GT	★★★★★	Close, but no cigar. You won't be disappointed by the performance it offers, though	3 1



## Phono amps

Dedicated units tend to sound better than the circuits integrated into amplifiers. Higher priced options usually allow for electrical optimisation for your cartridge, thus producing better results

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM	MC	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £500</b>							
Cambridge Audio 651P	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	2.5x8x11
Graham Slee Gr-Amp 2 Comm.	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	7x10x25
Leema Elements	495	03.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	2	5x11x10
Lehmann Black Cube	325	02.09/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	5x11x11
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	2	7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	1	6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	2	7x43x33



## Cartridges

**Moving magnet (MM)** These produce a higher output, giving your phono stage an easier time  
**Moving coil (MC)** Can produce more detail, but is more demanding of your phono stage

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM/MC	Tracking weight (g)
<b>Up to £500</b>					
Goldring 2100	92	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Grado Prestige Silver	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Nagaoka MP110	89	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Ortofon 2M Black	460	04.11/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Bronze	275	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Red	80	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Rega Exact	195	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.75
Roksan Corus Silver	400	01.11/FT	★★★★★	MM	1.9

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## SC-LX78 9.2 Channel AV Receiver

- ✓ 4k Upscaling / Pass Through
- ✓ Dolby Atmos
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- ✓ Apple AirPlay



**Was £1699**  
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## SC-LX88 9.2 Channel AV Receiver

- ✓ 4k Scaling / Pass Through
- ✓ Dolby Atmos
- ✓ 250 Watts Per Channel
- ✓ Air Studios Tuned



**Was £2199**  
**Now £1499**

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## T5 Subwoofer (White Only)

- ✓ 8" Long Throw Drive Unit
- ✓ Sealed Box Design
- ✓ 125 Watts (RMS)



**Was £450**  
**Now £299**

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## T7 Subwoofer (Black or White Available)

- ✓ 8" Long Throw Drive Unit
- ✓ 10" Passive Radiator
- ✓ 200 Watts (RMS)



**Was £699**  
**Now £399**

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## T9 Subwoofer (Black or White Available)

- ✓ 10" Long Throw Drive Unit
- ✓ 10" Passive Radiator
- ✓ 300 Watts (RMS)
- ✓ 0% Finance Available



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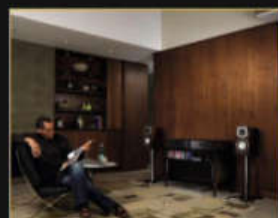
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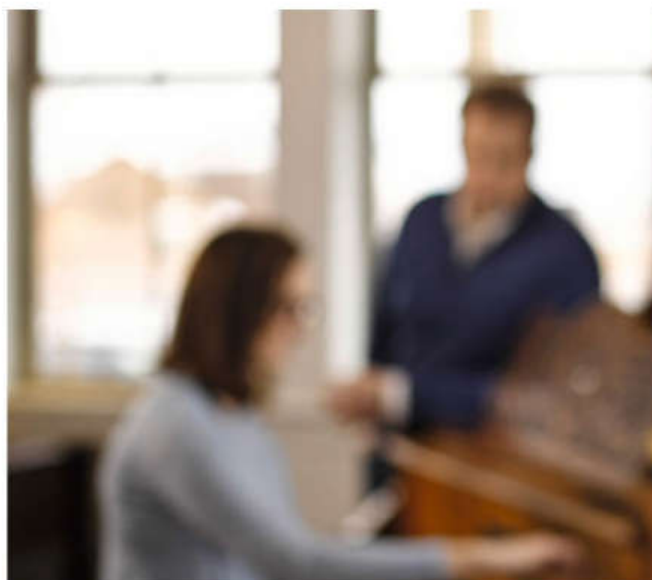
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December 1983

# THAT WAS THEN



Our December 1983 issue featured the first What Hi-Fi? Awards, with just 14 categories

**T**he first CD players went on sale, Michael Jackson's *Thriller* was the best-selling album in the UK, and *Return of the Jedi* was released in cinemas - 1983 was a good year. And the December issue of the magazine that year also featured the inaugural *What Hi-Fi?* Awards.

Just 85p bought you a copy of the largely black and white magazine, with 13 pages dedicated to 84 nominated products across 14 categories - 'Products of the Year' as they would be known.

The winners in 1983 were chosen by four judges - selected from "our most longstanding reviewers" - under the careful eye of editor Matt Nicholson. But the criteria on which the products were judged have remained consistent. As we said in 1983: "The most important yardstick was overall value for money." That's as true now as it was then.

## Innovation and design

Back then, the hi-fi market itself was a more straightforward affair. There were no wireless speakers, no multi-room systems and fewer pairs of headphones.

The first ever Awards categories read as follows: amplifiers, tuners, cassette

decks, turntables, speakers, cartridges, headphones, systems, personals, portables, CD players, cosmetic design, most innovative and Judges' Award.

So no AV or streaming products, fewer portable product categories, a specialist cartridge category, and a few categories based on innovation and design.

## New products

The categories and the number of winners may change, but our reasons for picking them remain broadly the same now as they did more than 30 years ago.

As *What Hi-Fi?* editor Matt Nicholson said back then: "The hi-fi industry is changing faster than we know. By the time the 1985 Awards come around, there will be a new set of products, surpassing even these."

That's truer now than it ever was. And it's also why we will continue to highlight the best-value audio and video products on the market, no matter what shape or form that kit takes.

Fast forward to today, the Awards still bring you the best value in audio and video kit



## WHAT HI-FI?

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# Clearway speaker cable

*"We wanted to build a cable that opened the door to musical landscapes in a similar way to high-end speaker cables. Clearway has a dual layer shield, oxygen-free copper conductors and FEP conductor insulation. We've made an affordable speaker cable that sounds and looks like it should cost a lot more than £10.00 per metre."*

**Nigel Finn**  
Technical Director

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## brilliance evolved

Audiolab's new 8300 Series has big shoes to fill. After all, the preceding product generation has won more awards in the UK press during the last five years than any other range of high-performance audio electronics.

We've worked long and hard to ensure that the 8300CD improves upon its illustrious predecessor in key areas, delivering even better performance as both a CD player and a DAC/preamp for external digital sources. Built around the peerless ESS Sabre DAC, the 8300CD now extends resolution to 32-bit/384kHz and adds DSD compatibility via USB.

Likewise, the 8300A integrated amplifier, with its radically redesigned circuitry and high-performance phono stage, is perfectly poised to build on foundations first laid in 1983 by the classic 8000A – one of the most influential British hi-fi components of all time.

Audiolab's new 8300 Series is the best, made better – coming to an Audiolab retailer near you this October.